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General Assembly
Fifty-third Session

Official Records

10th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 22 September 1998, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Opertti ..... (Uruguay)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 118

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/53/345/Add.2)

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: In a letter contained in document A/53/345/Add.2, the Secretary-General informs the President of the General Assembly that, since the issuance of his communications contained in documents A/53/345 and addendum 1, Togo has made the necessary payment to reduce its arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of this information?

It was so decided.

Address by Mr. Valdas Adamkus, President of the Republic of Lithuania

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Lithuania.

Mr. Valdas Adamkus, President of the Republic of Lithuania, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Republic of Lithuania, His Excellency Mr. Valdas Adamkus, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Adamkus: First, let me congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of this important session. I am certain that this session will provide us with the opportunity to discuss the role that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has played during the last 50 years and has yet to play.

I should also like to take this opportunity to convey my respects to the Secretary-General, who, by his decisive steps in critical moments this year, has repeatedly demonstrated the importance of the United Nations in contemporary world affairs.

Throughout the last 50 years the United Nations has changed no less dynamically than the rest of the surrounding world. Reviewing the successes and failures of the Organization, we have to acknowledge its complex and important role in building a more peaceful world. The United Nations at present is living through a complicated period of internal reform designed to reinforce the values and principles which half a century ago encouraged the States of the world to sign the Charter establishing the United Nations, which guides us today into the twenty-first century. I speak of peace, democracy and the environment and of ensuring and promoting the development of freedom of the individual.

98-85846 (E)

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This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption by the General Assembly of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This crucial instrument declares the will of the people of the world to establish a universal understanding of individual freedom, equality and dignity, which are indivisible and must not be undermined. Today we should be particularly concerned to what extent the principles declared by the United Nations throughout the last 50 years have become the bedrock of our everyday life. It would be most appropriate to ask whether the United Nations has become an Organization of world nations rather than States.

In the contemporary world of advanced communications, the exchange of values and ideas takes place at a particularly high speed. It is therefore not surprising that freedom, justice and well-being carry the same meaning in Europe and Asia, Africa and America. I believe we are approaching a common denominator for democracy so that democracy will no longer be identified only with the West and rapid economic development only with certain regions of the world. Above all, we hope that the realization of human rights throughout the world is consistent with the spirit of the Declaration of Human Rights signed 50 years ago.

In the cold-war world of divided ideologies, the United Nations was one of the very few forums embodying the common human interest: the concern for peace. Today the United Nations can contribute considerably to the creation and education of free individuals and active citizens of the world.

History has proved that democratic and prosperous States provide the most favourable environment for human activities. The United Nations should therefore continue its efforts to promote democratization and sustainable development. The ongoing institutional reform of the Organization may serve this end. However, I should like also to underscore the need to pay even greater attention to the promotion and protection of human rights.

Willingly and freely we have empowered the Security Council to make binding decisions to which we are then committed. We therefore want the decisions to be of high quality, effective and acceptable. Two highly qualified industrialized countries could become permanent members of the Security Council; their membership would strengthen the Council and ensure democratic decisions. A broader representation of developing nations on the Council would also reinforce its legitimacy and enhance respect for it. These nations deserve additional seats, both permanent and non-permanent. Equitable representation in the Council should be expanded through a more just representation of regions, Central and Eastern Europe in particular.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, has noted that today's human rights violations are the causes of tomorrow's conflicts. War-ravaged Bosnia and conflict-inflamed Kosovo today are painful illustrations of these words. Lithuania welcomes the initiative of Secretary-General Kofi Annan to integrate human rights protection into the broad range of the Organization's activities. We likewise welcome the ongoing institutional reforms of human rights protection and propose to employ with greater effectiveness the experience and intellectual potential of such regional bodies as the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

One of the most laudable recent achievements of the world's nations is the adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court. By taking this decision, the international community demonstrated its readiness for a qualitative leap in international relations based on an effective system of international justice — an instrument designed to complement national legal systems and to encourage their continuous development.

It is gratifying that the Court has been granted the right to charge persons with criminal responsibility for the gravest crimes of all: genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. This step demonstrates our resolution to fight against the horrors for which there are no — and cannot be any — political or ideological boundaries. "Crime of aggression" in the Statute is a pending issue requiring the political will of States and a more precise legal definition. The bitter facts of modern history remind us that aggression too often leads to genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

I would like to note that Lithuania, which actively participated in the work of the Preparatory Committee and the Rome Conference, will in the near future sign the Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Today we all face the challenges of our contemporary world which have been caused by rapidly developing technologies and negligent human activities. These challenges, although not as evident as open military conflicts, are no less threatening. A devastated and deteriorating environment may cause conflicts on a scale unknown before. The struggle for fresh water, rich soil and natural resources can turn man against man and

nation against nation. Neither democratic political processes nor economic development will matter then.

As a man with a long-standing commitment to environmental protection, I invite you to make use of the international capabilities of the United Nations and to pay more attention to ecological issues. If we are genuine in our attempt to place this institution at the vanguard of human rights protection, environmental issues should be given priority on our agenda. Lithuania will support every initiative to preserve and conserve natural resources. As one such step, I yesterday signed the Kyoto Protocol, reaffirming our commitment to tackling global warming by reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases. Now we look forward to decisive action on climate change in Buenos Aires later this year.

Every individual has the incontestable right to live in a healthy and clean environment. I am certain that the United Nations can play a significant role in promoting respect for the environment among people and States of the world. With its long experience in international cooperation and its prominent international standing, this Organization can contribute notably to the environmental education of the global community. It can also serve as a promoter of inter-State cooperation through the timely exchange of information on disasters — past, present and future. The Prior Informed Consent (PIC) Convention on trade in hazardous chemicals and pesticides, which was signed in Rotterdam a couple of days ago, is a remarkable example of prospective activities of the United Nations system.

The growing problems of international crime and terrorism affecting us are no less important than environmental issues. Terrorist bombings and illicit trafficking in arms, narcotic substances and human beings, as well as money laundering, infringe the vital interests of people and States to live in a secure and predictable world. The solution to these problems demands collective efforts as well as resolute and immediate action. It is gratifying that the heads of State and Government, as well as interior ministers, confirmed their commitment to constructive cooperation at the twentieth special session of the United Nations General Assembly, on drugs. The approved drug-demand reduction and prevention programme, along with the guidelines for international cooperation, should facilitate the resolution of these problems.

Children and young people — our future — should be the focus of the fight against drug-trafficking. Timely adoption and launching of preventive measures and educational programmes, as well as the building of a drug-free environment, must be our immediate first steps. It is delightful that Secretary-General Kofi Annan has shown particular attention to this problem.

Control of the arms trade, which is becoming increasingly complex, is another painful reality facing us at the end of this century. Smugglers arm not only terrorists, but also nations or States at war. Without any further delay we should forestall illicit arms circulation by, first and foremost, restricting the sale of small arms and light weapons in conflict zones. We should persist in our efforts to find an effective solution to the issue of general and complete disarmament.

The nuclear arms race, which emerged in South Asia this year, has revealed the survival of the cold war ideology of the balance of powers in the political thinking of certain States. Such reasoning is short on constructiveness since it does not enhance international security, and it diverts human resources and creative powers into erroneous directions, undermining the aspirations of the individual to a safer and wealthier life.

Lithuania is neither a zone of potential conflict nor a place for the manufacturing or circulation of conventional weapons or weapons of mass destruction. Nevertheless, Lithuania endeavours to participate actively in different agreements on disarmament and arms control through which it helps itself and others. My country has ratified the conventions prohibiting biological, chemical and certain conventional weapons. Ratification of the convention prohibiting anti-personnel mines is our long-term goal.

It is my belief that the right of the individual to a secure life and future — a right still missing from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights — fully corresponds to the spirit of the Declaration and should be realized through our political initiatives. The security of the individual will be best ensured if the State he lives in is secure. Good neighbourly relations and close regional cooperation are prerequisites for the peaceful coexistence of nations, and all humankind aspires to this. Lithuania is guided by those principles and maintains friendly, constructive relations with all its neighbours, Russia among them.

The United Nations today acts not only in a multi-polar but also multi-problem environment. By itself it is not capable of addressing and resolving all the problems which we often tend to call "hot" issues and which demand immediate solutions. Therefore, the Organization

should interact with greater vigour in its endeavours with regional organizations that, in many cases, succeed in the areas where global forums fail. Europe has already provided us with an example of such productive interaction through concrete cooperation of the United Nations with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Europe, however, has other, smaller organizations which can also considerably contribute to the goals of the United Nations and to the implementation of their spirit. The Council of the Baltic Sea States, of which Lithuania has recently assumed the chairmanship, is one of them. This Council unites geographical neighbours who also enjoy many, more binding links: the promotion of mutual confidence, trade, culture and environmental protection. During the term of its chairmanship, Lithuania will strive for a more active and effective contribution of this regional cooperation body to the implementation of the goals of the United Nations.

The fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a reminder of the indivisibility of the values of human life, dignity and welfare. Political activities at both the international and national levels should be directed to promoting and protecting these values. More and more threats to human rights and freedoms arise today from sources beyond the control of national Governments. Never before have the issues of coordination and enhanced cooperation been as crucial as they are today. The United Nations possesses all the potential necessary to perform the role of active international coordinator and peace promoter. But the realization of this potential requires determination from us, the representatives of nations and members of the international community.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Lithuania for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Valdas Adamkus, President of the Republic of Lithuania, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mrs. Janet Jagan, President of the Republic of Guyana

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Guyana.

Mrs. Janet Jagan, President of the Republic of Guyana, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Republic of Guyana, Her Excellency Mrs. Janet Jagan, and to invite her to address the Assembly.

President Jagan: In just 15 months, our world will enter a new millennium, leaving behind it a chequered past to face the challenges of a yet uncharted future. It is not too early to contemplate this historic conjuncture and to give some thought to how best we may deal with the uncertainties ahead.

This fifty-third session of the General Assembly offers, we believe, a timely opportunity for such reflection. Your leadership, Mr. President, will be essential to the success of our exploration. We are assured that your diplomatic experience and skills, demonstrated in the service of your native Uruguay, will contribute greatly to the success of our deliberations.

To your predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko of the Ukraine, we offer our sincere appreciation and thanks for the admirable guidance which he provided the Assembly over the past year.

Our gratitude is extended to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for the inspired direction which he has given to our Organization. From the report that he has been good enough to present us on the activities of the last 12 months, we are able to see clearly those areas where our stated goals have been reached and, equally importantly, those which require our further attention and effort.

Certainly, among the developments that are most heartening is the spread of democracy within recent times. It is a happy coincidence that this year we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, which embodies the principles of democracy. The democratic system has emerged as a popular form of government for many States Members of the United Nations. Guyana has rejoined this growing majority. Unfortunately, this had to come after hard struggles and our people experienced three decades of lost opportunities under an undemocratic regime. Only last December, for the second time this decade, elections were held under international scrutiny, leading to the re-

election of my Government to office. However, despite the fact that the outcome was adjudged by international observers to be free and fair, the minority opposition refuses to abide by the result. Consequently, the will of the electorate has been questioned. Unfortunately, this negation of elections conducted in a free and fair manner is not limited to Guyana and increasingly requires our attention. Naturally, my Government cannot tolerate this state of affairs, nor should the United Nations, which by its Charter is called upon to protect the gains of new and restored democracies.

It is vital that the international community and the United Nations rally in support of our efforts to achieve better governance and to guarantee the enjoyment of all human rights by our citizens. We need to go beyond the holding of periodic elections to ensuring the observance of the rule of law and building the institutions upon which democracy must rest.

Regrettably, many of our democracies are severely limited, in terms of their own resources, in their ability to satisfy these pressing needs. As a result, hard-won gains are under constant threat of erosion. We firmly believe that it is in the interest of the international community as a whole to assist in the strengthening of the democratic system as a bulwark against encroachment by oppressive regimes. Only through such cooperation can the democratic ideal take root and flourish throughout the world. On our part, we will staunchly defend the gains of our people and we are resolved not to allow ourselves to slide once again into the darkness of dictatorship.

Needless to say, the spread of democracy within States must be matched by democracy among States. The United Nations was founded in 1945 on the premise of the sovereign equality of all States. This principle is the rock upon which international cooperation among peoples has been built. In their operation, therefore, all organs and agencies within the international system must be cognizant of the views and wishes of all States. Developing countries in particular need to be adequately represented in these bodies to ensure that their concerns are addressed.

In this scheme of things, we attach great importance to reaching general agreement on how the Security Council must be transformed into an organ that enjoys the confidence and support of all States. Clearly, the body which was created in the aftermath of the Second World War is no longer appropriate to the circumstances of today's world. Sorely needed now is a more representative and transparent Council that can adequately address new threats to international peace and security. Accordingly, we encourage the Working Group that was created to reform the Council to persist in its search for a suitably reformed Council.

Our task is made especially urgent by the realization that, despite our perseverance, the achievement of international peace and security remains a frustrating will-o'-the-wisp. There are today more peacekeeping operations than the international community appears able or willing to sustain. Some have been reasonably successful, and, others appear to promise eventual settlement. Most, however, seem to be ending with little to show for the considerable investment of time and money.

One can only conclude from these varying results that increasingly we will have to turn to preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-building to fully address and treat the root causes of tension.

We are also constantly reminded that, notwithstanding the abatement in East-West tensions, the dangers of a nuclear catastrophe are still very real and present. It is impossible to guarantee, in an unstable world such as ours, that nuclear weapons will not be used, either intentionally or inadvertently. Only a complete prohibition of such weapons, binding upon all States, can reduce the risk of nuclear disaster. My Government therefore urges the international community to move swiftly to a total elimination of these weapons coupled with an undertaking to discontinue their production.

At the same time, we must redouble our efforts to curb the flow of conventional weapons, which serves to fuel conflagrations in trouble spots throughout the world. We must also intensify our search for a collective system of security upon which all States can rely for protection.

Peace, as has been so aptly said, is not the mere absence of war. True peace can only come if it is built on a foundation of sound economic and social development. The foremost obstacle to peace is poverty, which, when it can be borne no longer, explodes with a vengeance. It is imperative, therefore, that the problem of poverty be squarely addressed by the United Nations with a view to halving its incidence by the year 2015. Reaching this target will require concerted action by both developed and developing countries. The developed countries have a vested interest in the economic prosperity of developing countries, since they represent

important markets for their exports. A renewal of the dialogue between the industrial and the developing nations is urgently needed to achieve the eradication of poverty. My Government intends to make this a primary goal during this year's session of the Assembly.

Notwithstanding the onerous debt obligations and a physical infrastructure which we are tackling as a priority, Guyana has come a long way in overcoming poverty and maximizing its full growth potential. Thus, we continue to rely heavily on external assistance for our economic development. We are therefore particularly concerned by the rapid diminution of resources made available for financing by both bilateral donors and multilateral agencies. While private investment flows have a role to play in the development process, they are still far too selective to be of benefit to weak economies. We need to be assured of the continued provision of official development assistance, sufficient investment flows, technological transfer and trade opportunities that would allow for adequate development.

As we move into the next century, we have to recognize the reality that developing countries are extremely vulnerable to changes in the world economy. The present course of globalization and liberalization has led to marginalization of the poorer countries. Guyana is a case in point. We have returned to the democratic fold and have achieved fairly high growth rates despite structural adjustment programmes. But after a few years, we are now faced with a steep drop in prices of our main export commodities, the drying up of developmental aid, adverse global weather conditions and so forth. At the end of the day, our people face tremendous hardships.

We are being told that growing investment is needed. We open our economies to work with the private sector for development, and we see investment being directed away from the poorer countries, making them incapable of modernizing their economies. There is a need for a global consensus to assist developing countries to complete their transition so that they can be equal players in the globalization process.

The alternative is to continue to ignore the danger signals which are becoming more and more evident. And, as usual, the rich countries will be able to solve their problems, but will do so at the expense of the poorer countries. The gap between the poor and rich will become greater, and conflicts will continue. The narcotics trade, mass migration, international crime, poverty and other ills will put severe strains on new and restored democracies.

As we have become painfully aware, threats to our environment also impinge on our peace and security. Global warming and climate changes have increased the vulnerability of small States such as Guyana to a wave of natural disasters. The El Niño phenomenon recently inflicted on our country a period of intense drought, taking a heavy toll on our economy.

In our continuing efforts to develop our country and meet the needs of our people, especially those living in poverty, my country remains dedicated to the preservation of the environment and the sustainable development of our resources. We are concerned, therefore, that when we seek to exploit our forest and other resources for the benefit of our people, we face criticisms from those who accuse us of disregard for the environment.

These reproaches are entirely ill-informed, if not mischievous. A land of abundant and pristine forests, Guyana runs no risk of deforestation. We have in fact put in place firm legislative and administrative arrangements to ensure the conservation of our natural resources. Moreover, under the Iwokrama rain forest project, we have set aside almost a million acres of these forests for research by the international community into the preservation of biodiversity and the sustainable use of the forests.

The four pillars which I have listed — democracy, economic and social development, human rights and the elimination of poverty — are indispensable to the construction of peace. Events in the post-war period have not only confirmed this fact, but have also shown that the building of peace and development must be the work of the international community. Persuaded of the need for enhanced multilateralism, my Government is committed to the realization of the late President Cheddi Jagan's vision of a new global human order. The thrust of his proposal sought to reduce the ever widening and dangerous gap which exists between countries in the North and those in the South.

Recalling the Marshall Plan, which served to rebuild Europe from the ashes of the Second World War, Mr. Jagan argued for a similar enterprise to eradicate poverty, promote good governance and bring development to all peoples. Only through such enlightened cooperation can the world enjoy the blessings of peace. I wish, therefore, to renew his plea and to call for early agreement on the establishment of a more just and equitable system of international relations. With the

necessary determination and effort, we can make the twenty-first century a golden age for all humanity.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Guyana for the statement she has just made.

Mrs. Janet Jagan, President of the Republic of Guyana, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Raúl Cubas Grau, President of the Republic of Paraguay

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Paraguay.

Mr. Raúl Cubas Grau, President of the Republic of Paraguay, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations, the President of the Republic of Paraguay, His Excellency Mr. Raúl Cubas Grau, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Cubas Grau (*interpretation from Spanish*): It is with great pleasure that I speak today, before this esteemed forum for international dialogue, on behalf of my country, the Republic of Paraguay. First of all, I would like to congratulate the President of the General Assembly and to extend to him my best wishes for success in the important task of guiding the work of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly of this Organization.

I also have the pleasure to greet the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and to extend to him, on behalf of the people of Paraguay, our congratulations on his excellent fulfilment of his important mission.

As the century comes to an end, so does a decade that has been for the world, and particularly for nations such as mine, a period of far-reaching and vertiginous transformation.

In 1989, after almost four decades of authoritarian rule, Paraguay regained its democracy. Since that time, a great number of profound and dramatic changes have taken place in the process of reaffirming our democracy, a process that today, I am pleased to announce, may now be considered definitively consolidated, since for the first time in 50 years a civilian President has transferred the presidency of the Republic to another democratically elected civilian. This is an essential milestone in the recent history of our freedom and a striking testimony to the Paraguayan people's firm and irreversible commitment to this system of government.

We took over the administration of a country with major economic, social and moral problems, but, faithful to the people's mandate, we will make the decisions that we deem appropriate and fitting to reactivate our economy, restore international confidence in Paraguay and, finally, ensure the sustainable and equitable development of its people.

This, today, is my commitment, and I will dedicate all my devotion and labour to it, though I am aware that this effort would be in vain without the understanding, solidarity and support of my people, as well as the involvement and cooperation of friendly countries.

In this regard, my Government has pledged to carry out a State agenda that is pragmatic and realistic. Its priorities will include restoration of the people's faith in their leaders through transparent, coordinated actions whose immediate effects will, in the short term, result in greater well-being for the population. We will also carry out an all-out war against poverty by doing away with the privileges that engender injustices and intolerable inequalities.

Another priority will be a rapid economic recovery through the implementation of social programmes and the construction of an infrastructure of all-weather roads, which will expedite and reduce the cost of the rapid transport of goods produced in rural areas to trade centres. We will also initiate programmes to provide inexpensive housing for a large sector of the population.

We will give priority to the fight against crime in all its forms, focusing on the elimination of the scourges of drug-trafficking and the piracy and illegal appropriation of intellectual property. The concrete actions we have taken during our first month in office have clearly shown our firmness, determination and commitment in this regard.

Another priority will be combating impunity, one of the ills that eats away at our society. We will be assiduous in the rigorous application of the law, which is the inevitable framework for ensuring confidence and

development, particularly against those who profit from State resources, depriving the rest of the community of their legitimate chance to aspire to a better standard of living. Exemplary measures will be adopted to address premeditated crimes in the economic and financial sphere.

We trust that these measures, along with those for the protection of private property and an adequate framework of incentives and security for foreign investment, will assist us in recovering Paraguay's international credibility and will bring in the flow of cooperation and investment necessary for our desired development.

The reform of the principal organs of the United Nations — the General Assembly and the Security Council — is of the greatest importance to us.

We have participated in the work of the Working Group on Security Council reform, and once again I wish to emphasize the importance we attach to the expansion of the Council in both of its categories; if the number of permanent members is increased, the number of non-permanent members must be increased as well.

This increase must include Latin America and the Caribbean and the other regional groups, without any discrimination.

We believe that the effort undertaken by the United Nations with regard to item 155 on the Assembly's agenda — "Measures to eliminate international terrorism" — is of the greatest relevance.

Paraguay vehemently condemns and rejects such acts of international terrorism as the attacks on the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

In this respect, we wish to express our conviction that any international action to prevent and subdue terrorism must be carried out in full and complete compliance with international law.

Another scourge, generally related to terrorism, is that of drug-trafficking, to which I have already referred. In this context, I must add that we are convinced that this is a problem of shared responsibilities among all countries involved, producing, transit and consuming countries. Our position on this point was clearly stated in the Declaration of the Twelfth Meeting of Heads of State and Government of the Rio Group, held in Panama City.

We welcome initiatives such as resolution 49/96, on horizontal economic cooperation and other modalities for cooperation among developing countries. We must also mention last year's Declaration and Plan of Action of San José, Costa Rica, which defines specific modalities for dealing with sectoral problems relating to cooperation in the spheres of trade, investment, finance and business.

However, we feel that the United Nations system should identify mechanisms, such as economic and technical cooperation, that will enable it to strengthen integration more effectively, and adopt decisions aimed at providing increased assistance. In this regard, my country will support such measures as will, in a more effective and coordinated manner, interest all participants — particularly private-sector participants — in the development process.

We also endorse strengthening the United Nations to increase efficiency within the institutions of the Organization.

If our Government programmes focus on supporting development with social justice we can give our peoples democracy, freedom and respect for human rights. However, we cannot ask our peoples to fight for development, to make greater sacrifices, if they do not see similar trends towards change and a unified commitment on the part of the international community.

Complying with our commitments made at the Summit for Social Development, Paraguay intends to achieve the goals set there. In this regard, I am pleased to state that the priorities of our Administration include the social development of the country; reduction of the unemployment rate; the eradication of poverty; preservation of the environment — a commitment to our future generations; heeding the demands of our youth; and supporting the advancement of women and of integrated societies.

Based on the fundamental principle of universality, the Republic of Paraguay feels that the United Nations system must welcome, without exception, all States that meet the requirements of the San Francisco Charter. Given this, and bearing in mind the elements that make up a State as well as other essential considerations, Paraguay feels that the proposed participation of the Republic of China in the United Nations and all its related bodies must be considered. This is what we would do with any other State that met the requirements of the Charter.

Mr. Montealegre Rivas (Nicaragua), Vice-President, took the Chair.

I would now like to refer to one of the most important strategies for the socio-economic development of my country: its participation in the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR), which is a fundamental objective of our foreign policy. The achievements of MERCOSUR, which was created in 1991 through the Treaty of Asunción, as part of the process of integration, are a matter of pride for our four countries — Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay — as well as for Bolivia and Chile. These achievements have encouraged us to renew our efforts, certain that the political will that has guided us so far will lead us to achieve the goals that we have set for ourselves: to strengthen and consolidate the Customs Union and to move towards a greater level of integration.

Moreover, it is encouraging to note that the path we chose in 1991 has attracted more and more interest from an increasingly globalized world. In this regard, MERCOSUR has shown its openness to dialogue, in particular with the sister countries of Latin America. We are not a closed community, but, rather, are open to initiatives that will promote economic, political and social cooperation. In this spirit, we are giving particular attention to the negotiations initiated to establish a free-trade zone for the hemisphere and to the negotiations we intend to hold in the near future with the European Union.

The recent crisis in financial markets in South-East Asia and Eastern Europe, which have in turn threatened the stability of the financial markets of emerging economies, are a disturbing feature of today's international scene. It was mentioned in the Declaration of the Twelfth Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Rio Group, held in Panama City, in which the position of the signatory countries is clearly expressed.

A great deal of hope has been placed in the work carried out by this Organization. We are on the threshold of a new millennium; the twenty-first century looms on the horizon, rich with opportunities and challenges. Our societies are suffering from the crisis of the birth of a new era, a new order, because we are not all yet adequately prepared to confront it.

Therefore, our societies demand leadership from the United Nations. The conclusions, recommendations and actions that may come from this Assembly could be of fundamental importance for our immediate future.

The problems emerging from the increase in globalization and interdependence, as well as the dizzying speed with which changes are taking place in the world, affecting all aspects of the human condition, force us inexorably to confront the challenge of finding the most ideal mechanisms for dialogue, understanding and effective and united international cooperation. We trust that the United Nations will be capable of meeting this challenge.

The Acting President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Paraguay for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Raúl Cubas Grau, President of the Republic of Paraguay, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 *(continued)*

General debate

The Acting President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Isack Mudenge, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Zimbabwe.

Mr. Mudenge (Zimbabwe): At the outset I would like to congratulate Mr. Didier Opertti on his unanimous election to the presidency of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. His election is a well-deserved tribute to his own admirable diplomatic skills and also a vote of confidence in his country, Uruguay. My delegation intends to cooperate fully with him as he guides the work of this Assembly.

I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to his predecessor, our friend Hennadiy Udovenko, of the Republic of Ukraine, for the able and exemplary manner in which he presided over the work of the fifty-second session.

In the same vein, we would like to pay tribute to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, whose style of work and vigorous response to the various crises that have beset the international community we deeply appreciate. We want to reiterate our confidence in his work and continued support for his leadership.

Following the United Nations fiftieth anniversary celebrations, we, the Member States, reaffirmed our

commitment to the purposes and principles of the Organization as enshrined in the Charter and further took on the responsibility of charting an institutional framework and operational parameters that would enhance the Organization's relevance and effectiveness in the twenty-first century. The reform proposals made by the Secretary-General in 1997 attempted to articulate a vision of the future for a United Nations Organization that is more focused and coherent and one that better reflects the new geopolitical realities of the post-cold-war era.

We are encouraged that the first phase of the reform of the United Nations system was launched when the Secretary-General began to implement those measures that fall within his sphere of competence as chief administrative officer of our Organization. My Government has taken full cognizance of those measures, as well as of proposals for reform, and is carefully considering them in detail.

The proposal to convene a Millennium Assembly to articulate a vision for the United Nations in the new century has our full support. All Member States must actively participate in the preparations for and holding of the Millennium Assembly in order to come up with a consensus document to guide the Organization into the next century. However, we believe that the proposed sunset provisions, which are to effect cut-off mechanisms for some issues on the United Nations agenda, need to be carefully considered. My Government will lend its support to any development dividend that channels savings generated by administrative efficiency into a Development Account, especially if it benefits developing countries. We must continue to search for a general agreement on the proper and efficient utilization of the Development Account.

When the reform process was first initiated, my Government alluded to the need for us, the Member States, to formulate a mechanism to deal with the financial crisis, which, much to our chagrin, continues to worsen. I reiterate once again that it is we, the Member States, who have to pay our dues promptly, in full and unconditionally or risk being an ineffective Organization that is incapable of meeting the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Still on the process of reform, my Government is disappointed by the excruciatingly slow progress being made in the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters Related to the Security Council. The key issue of the expansion still preoccupies the Working Group and a solution continues to elude that Group. Africa, for its part, remains steadfast in its just demand for two permanent seats — to be shared on a rotational basis — as well as for three non-permanent seats. The system of rotation is an innovation that Africa is proposing in the name of democracy and sovereign equality of Member States. It may not suit other regions, and we have stated that we are preparing it for the Africa region alone. I take this opportunity once more to urge our friends outside the Africa region to support our just demand, as it is intended to enhance the representative nature and authority of the Security Council.

It has also become apparent that the impasse in the deliberations of the Working Group is a result of the nonacceptance by a handful of powerful countries of the sacrosanct principles of equitable representation, democracy and transparency. We hold that the democratization of the United Nations system is integral to its continued legitimacy and efficacy. Conversely, the increasing inefficiencies and lack of efficacy that we witness today on the part of the Security Council are in large measure the consequence of its lack of moral authority, itself the result of the unrepresentative and undemocratic nature of the Council as it is presently constituted.

In the name of human rights, pressure has been brought to bear especially on developing countries to democratize their national political systems and to become more transparent, and most of them have done so. We therefore insist that the same processes of democratization and transparency should characterize international relations, particularly the reform of the United Nations system.

Let me recall that the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries has on several occasions spoken against the anachronistic and undemocratic nature of the power of the veto. The Movement has proposed the restriction of the scope of the veto to matters pertaining to Chapter VII of the Charter, with a view to its eventual abolition. But while the veto exists we insist that all new permanent members should, in accordance with the principle of sovereign equality of Member States, equally wield the power of the veto.

Africa has witnessed a dramatic broadening of relative peace and stability with the return of democracy to Liberia and Sierra Leone. The return of the legitimate Government of Sierra Leone is of particular significance to the African continent, as it came about as a result of

resolute action by the Economic Community of West African States to reverse the military coup in that country. This was in conformity with an Organization of African Unity (OAU) watershed resolution taken at the Harare summit in 1997 in response to the coup in Sierra Leone to the effect that henceforth Africa will not accept the change of a legitimate Government on the continent by military means.

Another example of the positive political developments in Africa has been the various steps taken by the present Government of Nigeria to return that key country to democratic governance. It is only fair that those who have been critical of events in that country in the past should now openly welcome the recent positive developments.

But the situation in Africa has not been without its disappointments. The deteriorating situation in Angola deserves our urgent attention. The achievement of peace and stability in that country continues to be obstructed by UNITA's constant and deliberate non-compliance with the implementation of the Lusaka Protocol or with relevant resolutions of the United Nations Security Council. We urge the UNITA leadership to heed to the voice of reason and give peace a chance in Angola. We equally urge those members of the international community who have influence on the UNITA leader to persuade him. In the meantime, we ask the international community to join Angola and the countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in their decision to work with those positive elements in UNITA who have committed themselves to continue with the peace process in Angola.

Sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of States are age-old principles of international law, and respect for them is the bedrock of inter-State relations. These fundamental principles are at the core of the United Nations Charter, to which we all subscribe. They are held equally sacrosanct in the Non-Aligned Movement, the OAU and many other international organizations. Therefore any violation of these principles cannot and must not be taken lightly, as it poses a serious threat to international peace and security.

Sadly, in our subregion, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has recently fallen victim to such flagrant violations of international law. In August this year, the Democratic Republic of the Congo found itself under siege by rebels supported by foreign troops. Realizing that the fall of Kinshasa was imminent, the legitimate Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, appealed for assistance from Southern African Development Community (SADC) member States to enable it to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The presence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo of allied forces from the SADC States of Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe is a response to this call and has the objective of upholding the fundamental provisions of the Charters of the United Nations and of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on the inviolability of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of member States. It is also in line with the OAU resolution approved at the Harare summit of 1997 condemning the change of legitimate Governments by military means, as well as in compliance with a 1995 resolution of the SADC Inter-State Defence and Security Committee in which SADC member States agreed to take collective action in cases of attempted coups to remove legitimate Governments by military means in the subregion. It is in conformity with that very decision taken by SADC that, as I speak, troops from the Republic of South Africa and the Republic of Botswana, two SADC countries, are involved in upholding the authority of the legal Government of Lesotho against army mutineers.

My country remains committed to the search for a negotiated settlement to the crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charters of the United Nations, the OAU and of SADC. It will be recalled that since the outbreak of the conflict, Zimbabwe has hosted two summits with a view to finding durable peace and stability in the Great Lakes region. The second Victoria Falls summit, held from 7 to 8 September 1998, called for a ceasefire in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Zimbabwe remains committed to this process. We appeal to the international community to support Africa's various initiatives aimed at establishing durable peace in the Great Lakes region.

My country is concerned about the situation in the Horn of Africa, where fraternal forces of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and Eritrea are facing each other, ready to go to war. We appeal to these brotherly countries to continue cooperating with the OAU in the search for a peaceful resolution to the border conflict. In Western Sahara, we urge the parties to complete the Houston accords peace process by holding the proposed referendum.

We condemn the recent killings of innocent people in the bombings of the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam. We are disappointed by the stalemate in the Middle East peace process. We urge the Government of Israel to show flexibility in carrying forward the peace process. The killing of Iranian diplomats in Afghanistan is regrettable and unacceptable in inter-State relations. We urge the parties to the Lockerbie affair to seize the present opportunity to resolve this sad, long-standing issue. We ask for good faith on all sides in order to carry the process forward.

The African continent continues to face a multitude of problems as it settles into the new world order. African countries are implementing painful political, social and economic adjustments to existing structures in order to respond to the twin processes of liberalization and globalization. We have embarked on structural adjustment programmes, often at the behest of the Bretton Woods institutions. These programmes have had a severely adverse impact on the social welfare of the African countries. The curtailment of expenditure on social programmes, particularly health and educational facilities, in the absence of the requisite safety nets, has worsened the living conditions of the majority of the African peoples and in some cases this has heightened instability and insecurity in our countries.

For many developing countries, the issue of resource flows cannot be dissociated from that of the external debt problem. Figures continue to indicate that the overall debt of developing countries is still on the increase. We believe that new, comprehensive and coordinated approaches to the debt and debt-servicing problem have to be adopted, including outright forgiveness.

The critical economic situation in Africa, the least developed and most marginalized of all regions, has to be addressed if global economic growth and interdependence are to have any meaning at all. Apart from the excruciating and debilitating debt, there is need for an increased flow of resources in the form of both official development assistance and foreign direct investment.

I wish to conclude my remarks on economic matters by mentioning an issue that is of vital importance to the question of sustainable development: the World Solar Programme 1996-2005, which was adopted by the World Solar Commission. The promotion and popularization of solar energy technologies can be a major contribution to solving the world's energy crisis and ensuring the availability of a clean and inexhaustible source of energy for sustainable development. I urge all Member States to support the draft resolution on the World Solar Programme, which will be presented at this session.

In the field of disarmament, the much vaunted peace dividend did not materialize at the end of the cold war. On the contrary, it appears that an arms race is still with us, and it is my Government's strong conviction that the international community must continue to work purposefully for nuclear disarmament, as well as for the total removal from the face of our planet of other weapons of mass destruction and for stricter control over the production, sale and movement of small arms. My delegation was deeply disappointed that the United Nations Disarmament Commission this year concluded its substantive session without reaching an agreement on the need for, or the agenda of, the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. We owe it to posterity to lay the foundations of a third millennium free from nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

My Government welcomes the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings, adopted at the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, and the recently adopted Statute of the proposed International Criminal Court. The international community has long witnessed how ill-equipped Member States of the United Nations have been in dealing with international terrorism, and for us in Africa the recent terrorist bombings of the United States embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam, which together claimed about 260 lives, brought home to us the vulnerability of developing countries to the sophistication of modern terrorism.

The Statute of the International Criminal Court has forged the missing link in the international legal order and is a genuine step forward in the field of human rights law. It has created new inter-State relationships and complementarity between national and international law. As we come to the close of the Decade of International Law, in 1999, we hope that the United Nations, especially the Security Council, will also take decisions that will result in the advancement of the primacy of the rule of law in international relations in the next century.

In conclusion, my delegation wishes to make a brief comment on the contemporary realities of the international situation. Our balance sheet leaves much to be desired. On the credit side, we have seen a modest measure of success. We have witnessed a return to

democracy and peace in some countries where once there was military despotism and armed conflict. We have successfully paved the way for the establishment of the International Criminal Court and forged new partnerships between our regional organizations and the United Nations. Yet we still have a daunting debit side. Conflicts still rage in many parts of the world. Poverty, inequality and underdevelopment still remain the order of the day for 90 per cent of the world's population. The AIDS pandemic threatens to reverse the socio-economic gains made in most of our countries over the years. The ongoing financial crisis which engulfed South-East Asia and now threatens the entire world reminds us that current efforts at a new architecture both for controlling the free flow of money and ushering in a new discipline in the financial institutions should be brought about without delay. We have to confront and reduce world poverty with determination at a time when some within the Organization itself are still resisting the democratic changes that are necessary for enhancing the image and authority of the Organization and making it effective in addressing these problems. Zimbabwe believes that the time for change is here and now and that Member States have a moral obligation to muster the political will to make those changes.

Let the fifty-third session of the General Assembly be one of qualitative and meaningful change for the people of the world.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The next speaker is the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, His Excellency Mr. Somsavat Lengsavad, on whom I now call.

Mr. Lengsavad (Lao People's Democratic Republic) (*spoke in Laotian; interpretation from French text furnished by the delegation*): First of all, I should like to extend my warmest congratulations to Mr. Didier Opertti on his well-deserved election to the presidency of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. His recognized skills as a veteran diplomat and his extensive knowledge of international affairs augur well for the success of our deliberations.

As we assure him of our complete cooperation, my delegation would like to wish him every possible success. I should like also to avail myself of this opportunity to pay tribute to Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of our Organization, for the crucial role that he has played in the preservation of peace and the promotion of socio-economic development throughout the world. We are extremely grateful to him for the laudable efforts he has made in the first two difficult years of his term.

In the past year, the world situation has continued to undergo changes that are more profound and complex than in the preceding years. World peace continues to be just as fragile. In various regions of the world, civil wars, conflicts among States, border disputes and ethnic, tribal and religious confrontations continue to take place. Some of these events offer no glimmer of abatement, while others have been deliberately provoked against the sovereignty of other States. In the face of this situation, it is important for the international community, in its respect for the Charter of the United Nations, to focus its energies and do its utmost to reduce tensions and assist the countries concerned in resolving their problems by means of negotiations, thus favouring the current general trend towards international cooperation for development. On the eve of the third millennium, States and peoples throughout the world should together endeavour to lay the appropriate solid foundations to construct a new era of relations based on peace, social justice and equality.

In certain regions of Europe, there has been a resurgence of deadly ethnic conflicts, resulting in enormous losses in human lives and material property. While coming out in favour of the inviolability of internationally recognized borders, we should like sincerely to appeal to the countries involved to show restraint and resolve their conflicts through dialogue.

In Africa, we are still witnessing ethnic confrontation, civil war and border conflicts that continue gravely to threaten peace, stability and cooperation. In view of the great suffering that the victimized peoples of certain countries of the region must ensure, the international community must render its support and assistance to the countries concerned in their efforts to resolve their problems by peaceful means and as soon as possible.

In the Caribbean, an atmosphere of peace and cooperation continues to prevail. In this context, we profoundly regret that the 30-year-plus economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed on the Republic of Cuba by the United States of America has not yet been lifted. In the interest of regional and world peace as well as in the interest of both the Cuban and American people, it is our hope that the two countries concerned will commit themselves to reasonable negotiations so as to resolve their dispute as soon as

possible in conformity with the general trend obtaining throughout the world.

In the Middle East, the situation appears tense. The peace process begun following the signature by the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel of the Washington Accords of 1993 has run up against grave difficulties in the past two years in the wake of the establishments of new settlements in Har Homa in East Jerusalem and of other unilateral measures that have been taken. In our view, it is imperative for the parties involved immediately to put an end to unilateral measures and speedily to restore a climate of mutual trust and continue seriously in their negotiations to achieve a general settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and other relevant General Assembly resolutions in order to contribute to the restoration of peace, security and cooperation in this very delicate region of the world.

On the Korean peninsula in general we are witnessing a reduction in tension. Contacts and talks among the parties concerned are continuing in a spirit of respect for mutual interests. While welcoming the efforts deployed, the Government and people of the Lao People's Democratic Republic would like to reiterate their sincere support for the profound aspirations of the Korean people to live in peace and to achieve the peaceful reunification of their cherished homeland.

In South-East Asia multifaceted beneficial cooperation among States is continuing under good conditions. Nevertheless, in the wake of the financial crisis that occurred more than a year ago, the countries of the region are now going through unprecedented grave economic difficulties. But thanks mainly to national efforts and regional and international cooperation, these countries are, through adjustment programmes, engaged in a process of profound economic restructuring in order to get back on track. The international community as a whole has been called upon to support them actively, particularly those most affected.

Another important event that has characterized our region was the holding last July of general elections in Cambodia, the results of which have been recognized and approved by the international community. As a nearby neighbour, the Lao People's Democratic Republic would like to express the hope that the Cambodian parties concerned will speedily form a coalition Government which, in accordance with the Constitution, will be headed by a prime minister from the party that has been elected by majority which would contribute to the establishment of national concord in Cambodia and the promotion of peace and stability in the region.

In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, socio-political stability continues to be securely guaranteed. In accordance with the Constitution, national legislative elections took place on 21 December 1997. The new National Assembly — the Fourth Legislature — has been set up and is made up of 99 members, including 21 women, representing the three major ethnic groups of the country.

In the economic sphere, the implementation of a recovery policy based on market mechanisms has produced generally satisfactory results. However, the monetary crisis that has severely afflicted all of South-East Asia and even beyond for more than a year has considerably affected our economy. But, resolutely basing policies on the principle of self-reliance and enjoying external cooperation, the Lao Government has mobilized all of its capacity in human, intellectual, natural and material resources to reduce to the minimum the adverse effects of this crisis on our society and to achieve normalization.

While some can gain in this era of globalization and economic liberalization, the fact is that most developing countries, particularly the least developed, have been largely marginalized and exposed to enormous difficulties and risks. In this context, the developed countries must do everything possible to render the necessary assistance to these countries so that they might catch up in their lagging development and have a share in the progress of the times.

Drug abuse continues to figure prominently on the international agenda. In this connection, the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic has taken the necessary measures with a view to reducing production and banning the illicit trafficking in drugs, opium in particular. The results of these measures are satisfactory. However, the illegal introduction of synthetic drugs from abroad is still our main concern. In this connection, we welcome the unanimous adoption by the General Assembly at its twentieth special session of the Political Declaration and a programme of action, and we express the hope that the international community as a whole will mobilize itself and marshall the necessary financial resources to implement this ambitious programme.

The question of human rights is no less important in my country. Thus, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, my Government has officially announced the establishment of a national committee to commemorate this day solemnly on a wide scale with the sole purpose of publicizing the contents of the Declaration among the multi-ethnic Lao people and to promote harmony and mutual respect in our society.

The world today is confronted with numerous challenges. World peace remains fragile. Under-development, poverty, hunger and disease are among the priority problems that must be resolved. With the purpose of consolidating peace and achieving development throughout the world, the United Nations, our only universal multilateral forum, must make an important contribution. To be able to fulfil its mission in this new era, our Organization needs to restructure itself or to reorganize itself to be more effective.

In this connection, we would like to express our great appreciation to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for the reform initiatives he presented last year. Of course, these reforms which must, *inter alia*, stress the strengthening the role of the Organization and the promotion of development, represent an ongoing and difficult process. But in order for them to succeed, a solid financial basis must be assured. In that vein, it is high time that, in conformity with the United Nations Charter, all the Member States, particularly the main contributors, fulfil their financial commitments in full and on time. In so doing, we are giving the incipient reforms a chance, and in the final analysis we would be infusing energy into our Organization so that it could discharge its lofty mission as it confronts the challenges of our times.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Denmark, His Excellency Niels Helveg Petersen.

Mr. Petersen (Denmark): Let me first associate myself with the statement by my colleague, the Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, on behalf of the European Union.

We embark upon this session of the General Assembly in the midst of challenges that affect all continents. We can deal with those challenges only if we display resolve and a common vision.

That vision, clear and simple, is enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. We must strive to maintain international peace and security, respect for human rights and dignified living conditions for all. Every State joining the United Nations has committed itself to that vision.

To realize our vision, the rule of law must prevail. We base our national societies on the rule of law, and much is made of the rule of law within our societies. The rule of law offers the strongest defense against arbitrary exercise of power, but we sometimes neglect its importance in the international context.

My call for greater commitment to the rule of law internationally is not meant to belittle the progress made. The Charter has inspired an impressive body of specific treaty law governing the behaviour of States. Laws on human rights, disarmament, the environment and outer space, and the law of the sea and international trade law are important examples.

We celebrate this year the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed by the General Assembly in December 1948. The Declaration covers civil and political rights, as well as economic, social, and cultural rights. It has had an immense impact upon the standard-setting work of the United Nations and within each Member State.

Human rights are universal. They must be guaranteed to all persons without discrimination and observed by all countries irrespective of their form of government. That is the essence of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Indeed, it would be contradictory to talk about human rights if they were not accorded to all human beings, wherever they live.

To deny the universality of human rights is to deny our common humanity. Freedom from torture, for example, must be respected everywhere, regardless of local traditions or local problems. Obviously, situations differ, but the human rights foundation is the same everywhere.

All States in Vienna in 1993 reaffirmed that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights constitutes a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations. All States further proclaimed that the promotion and protection of human rights is a legitimate concern of the international community.

A feature of present-day international law is that, by now, we have almost all the standards against which to hold Governments accountable for their acts. What we are still missing is an effective international machinery to ensure the implementation of all the rules in practice — to move from declarations to deeds. I wish to pay special tribute to the many human rights defenders who struggle in the front line for the defence of our common human values, often at the greatest personal risk.

It is a most proper contribution by the United Nations to adopt this year a declaration for the protection of the work of human rights defenders, those who strive to realize the solemn pledges contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We also warmly welcome the progress made in firmly establishing the rights of indigenous peoples.

Another landmark contribution was achieved this year through the historic adoption in Rome of a Statute for a permanent International Criminal Court. Time and again, we have observed the failure of national criminal law systems to punish the perpetrators of atrocities and those behind them. The shocking events from Cambodia, the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and now Kosovo and elsewhere are fresh on our minds.

The prospects for reconciliation and lasting peace are undermined if the perpetrators remain at large. A key objective of the International Criminal Court is exactly to restore the rule of law and end impunity. This is a matter not only of justice, but also of peace and security. The ad hoc Tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia have been an important first step, but only a preliminary step. We need a permanent institution.

Denmark urges all States to ratify the Statute of the International Criminal Court. It is an urgent task to set this historic building block in the construction of international society in place. In light of experiences gained, the door is open for adjusting the functioning of the Court to the needs of the world community. The review clause in the Statute — a proposition strongly advocated by Denmark all along in the negotiations — assures that.

The signature in December last year in Ottawa by 121 States of the Convention to ban the use and production of anti-personnel landmines has established a very important norm in international humanitarian law. For too long has this inhumane, indiscriminate weapon been allowed to claim thousands of innocent civilian victims every year. We welcome the entry into force of the Convention by 1 March 1999. Let us now intensify our joint efforts to clear the many mines already in the ground. Denmark offers its continued support.

A most disturbing factor in the international legal order are the terrorist attacks taking innocent lives and jeopardizing relations among States. The international community must continue to condemn all acts, methods and practices of terrorism as criminal and unjustifiable under all circumstances, wherever and by whomsoever committed.

No ends justify such means, but, apparently, condemnation is not enough. We need to further strengthen international cooperation to prevent, combat and eliminate terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. There must be no safe haven for terrorists. Those responsible for terrorist acts must be brought to justice. If traditional extradition agreements cannot bring about such a result, less traditional arrangements must be contemplated, as envisaged in regard to the horrendous terrorist bombing over Lockerbie.

In May this year, India, regrettably, decided to resume nuclear testing after 24 years of self-imposed restraint. Pakistan, regrettably, followed India's lead and conducted its own tests for the first time. These tests not only contradict the non-test norm that had developed over the past two years. They also endanger peace and stability in the region and internationally. Therefore, the nuclear testing by India and Pakistan is of legitimate concern to the international community.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons enjoys almost universal support. A substantial number of countries have ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and more are following every month. These two Treaties are the cornerstones of the international non-proliferation regime and the foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament. I urge those countries — including India and Pakistan — that have not yet done so, to sign and move to ratify these Treaties without condition.

This year marks the first half-century of United Nations peacekeeping. The first mission was established 50 years ago, based on the goals of the United Nations Charter. Since then, United Nations peacekeeping has developed norms and principles of its own: consent of the parties, impartiality and non-use of force. These

principles continue to guide the international community's efforts in securing peace and stability on all continents.

Peacekeeping operations are an important illustration of the resolve of the international community, represented by the United Nations. Their successes are real. In the Middle East and Cyprus, the United Nations has been a source of stability for many years. In Mozambique, United Nations peacekeepers have demobilized thousands of combatants and made room for democratic elections. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the United Nations preventive deployment remains an essential stabilizing factor. And in Bosnia and Herzegovina today, the United Nations is responsible for the crucial task of training and restructuring local police forces.

Denmark has a long tradition of contributing to United Nations peacekeeping operations. Danish forces took part from the very beginning and have served the United Nations faithfully for the last five decades. In recent years, Danish forces have served all over the world, from the Middle East to the Balkans, as well as in Asia and in Africa.

Today's peacekeeping challenges differ from those of earlier decades and much work has been done to adjust the United Nations to the new challenges. Denmark has taken an active part in the process. Together with other countries, Denmark aims to improve the United Nations capacity for rapid reaction within the framework of the standby system. Denmark is also engaged in the creation of a new peacekeeping capacity of the Baltic States and of southern Africa.

The demand for adjustment and reform continues. There is still work to be done in areas such as preplanning and logistic support. But peacekeeping goes beyond military operations. A broader, integrated approach involving components such as civilian police, preventive diplomacy and humanitarian assistance is called for. Such conceptual flexibility will add to the strength of United Nations peacekeeping.

We, the United Nations Members, must be ready to meet our obligations and equip the Organization with the necessary tools for these future challenges. We must also, of course, ensure the safety of personnel working for the United Nations.

We are witnessing an enhanced role for regional organizations. Their special expertise has proved valuable in addressing causes of conflict and establishing a basis for settlement. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe is a good example.

A division of labour between organizations is necessary, but it must not lead to confusion in leadership and responsibility. The United Nations remains the core institution in the international legal order and must maintain a central role in international efforts to ensure peace and security.

We are approaching the twenty-first century, a century in which international society also should be governed by the rule of law. The norms of international law are universal but, sadly, they are not always universally respected.

Respect for national sovereignty cannot be invoked as an excuse to avoid the obligations of international cooperation and international law. International criticism of violations of human rights and of international humanitarian law is fully legitimate.

The role of the United Nations in this respect remains crucial. Indeed, direct intervention by the international community through the United Nations can be fully justified and legitimate, including in grave cases of humanitarian law being violated.

Respect for the rule of law in international relations can be ensured only if the international community and the United Nations possess the instruments and the resolve to act. In this respect, regrettably, we must note a certain paralysis in recent years in the face of grave humanitarian conflicts and emergencies.

Disagreement among Member States on how to deal with a particular crisis weakens the resolve of the United Nations to act. But we must, unfortunately, also note a lack of general support for the United Nations in certain quarters. The least we can expect from Members is for them to make the necessary resources available for the Organization, *inter alia*, by paying their contributions in full, on time and without conditions.

We must find ways which enhance the ability of the United Nations to deal with violations of international peace and security and other serious breaches of international law. Failure to act on such challenges is morally indefensible and betrays the principles of the United Nations Charter.

Violations and breaches must be met convincingly, with resolve and with the legitimacy of international law. Legitimacy will usually be provided by the Security Council. That is how it should be. Disagreement in the Security Council about a particular line of action must, however, never lead to the paralysis of the international community.

If, for instance, members of the Security Council cannot agree on a mandate for a peace operation, they must allow for other possibilities for effective action. When faced with an urgent agenda, the option should not be action or no action, but what line of action.

There will usually be a broad range of actions available for the international community. It is a question of choice and political will. It does not suffice to leave everything to the humanitarian agencies. Emergency relief, however necessary, is not a substitute for political action.

A reform of the Security Council can serve to strengthen the authority of the Council. But in the end we depend on the readiness of the members of the Council to act and to apply the same yardstick to all cases.

I should also like to emphasize the role and prerogatives of the Secretary-General in the field of peace and security. The Secretary-General has exercised these functions in a highly commendable way.

Before concluding, I wish to refer to the normative role of the United Nations as an important aspect of the rule of law. In particular, the United Nations conferences of the past decade have set valuable norms for improving living conditions for mankind. Common standards have been set in such important areas as eradication of poverty, environmentally sustainable development, gender equality and promotion and protection of human rights.

Achievements have been made in meeting these standards, but much remains to be done. The responsibility falls both to Member States and to the international institutions. The United Nations system must ensure, on its part, an effective and coordinated follow-up to the global United Nations conferences.

It is our collective responsibility to ensure that the financial resources are provided to attain these common standards. Denmark will continue to contribute development assistance in the amount of 1 per cent of our gross national product.

Let me conclude by expressing my conviction that the best way to promote the rule of law in international relations is through respect for democratic norms in our own societies.

The norm-setting activities of the United Nations have given an indispensable impetus towards democratization and good governance. Assistance to the establishment of democratic institutions in developing countries and countries with economies in transition can also make an important contribution. This is an overriding objectives of Denmark's considerable assistance to those countries.

Whatever challenges we face to the international legal order, we must never fail in our determination to follow the words of the preamble of the Charter:

> "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small".

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The next speaker on my list is the Chairman of the delegation of Panama, His Excellency Mr. Aquilino Boyd.

Mr. Boyd (Panama) (*interpretation from Spanish*): At the outset, we wish to express our heartfelt condolences and solidarity to the peoples of the Caribbean because of the suffering being experienced today in places such as Saint Kitts and Nevis, Antigua and Barbuda, St. Maarten, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic due to Hurricane Georges, which has hit the region.

The delegation I am honoured to represent joins in the congratulations extended to Mr. Opertti on his election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. This constitutes a recognition not only of his outstanding ability and merits, but also of the brotherly country of Uruguay, whose well-known international calling makes it an outstanding Member and representative of Latin America in this important international body.

We are also grateful to his illustrious predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, for his efforts to contribute to the Organization's modernization.

At the end of June, during the absence of the President of the General Assembly, Panama, as Vice-President, occupied the presidency of the General Assembly and had the honour of cooperating in the adoption of important measures on science, technology and computers.

Our gratitude goes also to the seventh Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, who, with the long experience he has gained over more than 30 years devoted to the Organization, is promoting reforms that will be of great benefit to the United Nations.

On Security Council reform, we endorse the recommendation of the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters Related to the Security Council that consideration of this item should continue during the fifty-third session of the General Assembly on the basis of the work carried out in previous sessions.

Panama recalls with gratitude that the holding of a Security Council meeting in Panama a quarter of a century ago and the support of the international community were extremely valuable to the Panamanian people in the fulfilment of its aspirations regarding the Canal.

Panama attaches great importance to discussions relating to economic issues, particularly those addressing sustainable economic development in order to eradicate poverty. We feel that by improving our education, our countries will better be able to focus on processes of reform, which must be undertaken gradually.

With regard to the globalization of the economy, the Republic of Panama congratulates the Secretary-General for having held on the 17 and 18 September a high-level dialogue on the social and economic impact of globalization and the interdependence of its political consequences.

Panama feels that the matters before the Fifth Committee relating to the process of adopting the budget are of great importance to the Organization, and we hope that Member States will faithfully comply with its suggestions.

My delegation believes that we should give full support to measures that will persuade Member States to pay on time and in full their obligations to the United Nations.

In our judgment, the most important tasks to be accomplished in order to neutralize the present economic crisis are the restoration of trust in the markets; the stabilization of the financial markets; the support of growth; allocation of the necessary means to the international financial institutions; and the immediate protection of the most vulnerable.

The financial markets and their problems are of global scope, yet the governmental efforts to resolve those problems have a strictly local range. This disparity is at the root of many problems we are now facing.

Economic globalization makes it necessary to strengthen the links of the United Nations with the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB).

The need to create an even playing field in the international system for economic cooperation is urgent and justifies the major efforts ongoing within the United Nations to restructure what has been called the "architecture" of the system.

We support the Secretary-General's repeated calls for more vigorous action towards some way of alleviating the enormous debts that are suffocating many countries and that they simply cannot carry. It seems to us that economic, social and environmental policy dimensions must be integrated in such a way that none of them is sacrificed for the sake of the others.

We were deeply impressed by the wise counsel on poverty given to us yesterday by President Mandela.

We urge the Secretary-General and the community of the United Nations to continue our efforts to ensure that the obvious benefits of globalization and its resultant interdependence do not serve to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. This could be done by establishing mechanisms that redirect part of the wealth generated to the praiseworthy goals of creating more hospitals, more modern schools and a higher standard of living for all people.

Panama has contributed to the cause of sustainable economic development by complying with Agenda 21 and the mandates of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The concrete result of

this was the adoption of Law 41 of July 1998, an overall environmental law for the Republic of Panama, which establishes the basic principles and regulations for protecting, preserving and restoring the environment. Another result is the preparation of an environmental strategy for the country within the framework of a process in which the whole of Panamanian society is participating; actions are concerted, and each sector is committed to holding up its end.

We must have a clear vision of the future where anything related to the environment is concerned, and we are sure that the Secretary-General will also make this clear in his plans for the future.

Panama has followed with great interest the events relating to peace in the Middle East and the problems of the war-torn former Yugoslavia. We support the comprehensive policy that must be pursued in Africa in order to move beyond the causes of conflict and promote lasting peace and sustainable development in the region. Similarly, we have followed with great interest the Secretary-General's efforts to advance the negotiations towards just and lasting peace in Cyprus so that the unification process can quickly be consolidated. We see serious dangers in the situation in Afghanistan.

At the Conference in Rome, my country agreed with all that was said in favour of the establishment of an International Criminal Court, and we are prepared, along with other Member States in the General Assembly, to make every effort necessary so that this court can bring to justice those who have committed serious crimes that are of concern to the international community.

As we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we recall with respect and admiration the work carried out by the great Panamanian internationalist Mr. Ricardo J. Alfaro, who was instrumental in the drafting of this document that is so important to humanity.

We will always be attentive to the need for United Nations programmes and policies to express the concern we feel over the violations of human rights that still occur in certain places.

With the establishment of its Ministry for Youth, Women, Children and the Family, the Republic of Panama has taken a very active part in protecting the rights of children in the workplace and is vigorously combating all aspects of prostitution and child pornography. We therefore applaud the work being carried out by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and we note with great satisfaction the effective work being done in this area by the Office of the First Lady of Panama.

We noted with concern the nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan, and condemned them at the time, since they run counter to the principles of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. At the same time, we would like to see implemented all the agreements included in the chemical and biological weapons conventions.

Panama continues to take an interest in the ban on anti-personnel landmines, and we are ever vigilant to ensure that our territory is free of these extremely dangerous mines.

The recent acts of terrorism in Africa and Europe are serious and unjustifiable crimes. They show clearly the need to further strengthen the legal and political framework to combat this scourge. We share the concerns expressed here yesterday regarding the dangers of terrorism.

As we stated at the recent Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Rio Group, which was held in our country, we reaffirm the importance of strengthening cooperation to combat terrorism at both the bilateral and multilateral levels, with full respect for the sovereignty and jurisdiction of each State.

Internationally, we reiterate our commitment to and support for efforts by the international community to combat terrorism, since terrorist activities, whatever their purpose and motivation, are, in addition to being a violation of human rights, immoral criminal acts, extreme acts of fanaticism that attack freedom, human life and the development of peoples.

Regarding drug-trafficking, we are convinced that the most effective way to make progress in combating drugs would be to see it as a multilateral problem, always bearing in mind respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each country. Panama therefore firmly supports the tasks and commitments established at the twentieth special session of the General Assembly, which was devoted to the common struggle against the world drug problem, as well as the principles and responsibilities established by the Organization of American States in this matter.

From 4 to 6 September, just a few days ago, a meeting of the heads of State and Government of the Rio Group was held in Panama, this year's Secretariat of the Rio Group, a consultative body for political harmony comprising 14 Latin American countries. The Latin American community is increasingly convinced that with solid cooperation resulting from political consensus of the Rio Group member States we can make greater strides at both the national and international levels.

Through the annual meetings of the heads of State and Government and the Foreign Ministers of the region we have established common objectives and commitments, which cover strengthening our democracies, questions of international peace and security, drug-trafficking, terrorism, human rights, combating poverty, sustainable development and international trade, as well as new issues, such as the year 2000 computer problem and the international financial crisis.

At the Rio Group meeting held in Quito in 1995, the Republic of Panama offered its territory as the headquarters for a forum where countries of the region could join in considering policies and measures aimed to eradicate trafficking in narcotics and other illicit substances, as well as in coordinating anti-drug measures and training programmes, which effectively support our efforts to combat drug-trafficking in the region.

The Universal Congress on the Panama Canal, meeting in our capital from 7 to 10 September 1997, clearly showed the need for contact with the international maritime community, the users and clients of the Canal, and considered creating an advisory board of the Canal Authority, in order to make use of the experience and wisdom of men and women throughout the world.

We reiterate our pledge that the Panama Canal will always be a public service, international in character and efficient and safe, without any form of discrimination. We are ready to assume full management of the Panama Canal on 31 December 1999, thus consolidating our territory under a single flag.

This is an appropriate occasion to reaffirm to the international community that after 31 December 1999 Panama will never again renounce control of the Canal, which is in our territory; it will be a symbol of the aspirations of many generations of Panamanians who have wanted this Canal to be an integral part of our territory in a free, independent and sovereign nation.

In conclusion, I believe it is fitting to recall here the following words of the President of Panama, Dr. Ernesto Pérez Balladares, to our Legislative Assembly on 1 September:

> "I wish to reiterate once again my commitment to democracy and my commitment to prepare for the transfer of the Canal without exclusions and without political sectarianism. The elections on 2 May 1999 will determine who will lead the country into the twenty-first century and who will close once and for all this historic era for our territory. For my part, I am certain that on 1 September 1999 there will be a President and a Legislative Assembly elected through transparent and democratic elections; that our nation is now prepared to assume full control of the Canal and its adjacent areas; and that, above all, the country will be reconciled, in peace and prepared to enter the next millennium without the presence of foreign military bases and with a modern, prosperous economy."

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Erik Derycke, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium.

Mr. Derycke (Belgium) (*interpretation from French*): I would first like to congratulate our colleague, the Uruguayan Minister Didier Opertti, on his election to the presidency of our General Assembly.

I would also like to associate myself with the statement made by our colleague, Mr. Wolfgang Schüssel, who spoke on behalf of the European Union. My country shares and supports entirely the concerns and objectives he outlined.

Unprecedented crises over the last few months have shaken our economies and the economies of the entire region. To varying degrees, the economies of the world have all sustained the social and political consequences of interdependence and the information systems that link them. It therefore seems to me that the time has come to rethink seriously the way in which international institutions and national Governments deal with the tensions and constraints which result from globalization.

This means specifically that we must reflect upon the quality of life humankind will have in the next century. Despite worrisome forecasts, we seem unable to come up with a list of priorities which reflects the global public interest. We must establish a common frame of

reference that ensures the peaceful coexistence of States and their citizens while at the same time respecting their diversity. This task is the indispensable corollary of globalization, which has numerous ramifications for current problems. The international community's responses have therefore been flawed and partial and subject to corporate logic and a narrow view of the issues.

The limitations of these responses are well known to us. Countless children died last year from diseases which could have been eradicated. Tropical forests covering an area equivalent to three times the size of Belgium disappeared. The developing world's debt remains untenably large, while expenditures for weapons continues to grow. Incalculable numbers of people have been detained, tortured, killed or forced to flee their countries. Hundreds of innocent victims have lost their lives in terrorist attacks.

Global information networks and new technologies reduce distances. Thanks to television, more than one billion people can today discover both man's incredible inventions and the worst abuses he is capable of. This is a scenario which touches our conscience.

Today's crises affect the entire global system and call for solutions on the same level. The only way to respond effectively is to give a greater role to international solidarity and social justice. Those are the two pillars of the new international ethic that I would like to call for today. This is not a simple task. No Government likes to limit its room to manoeuvre, even for just causes, if it is the only one paying the price for its commitments.

I am nevertheless convinced that the United Nations is the best forum to have a debate on this matter of international public interest. It is here, and nowhere else, that we can draw up universally accepted norms that have the approval of the largest possible number of States. The Organization can help us strengthen international consensus and the acceptance of codes of conduct designed to set the boundaries of human dignity and peaceful coexistence.

Economic and financial power dominates the world, but the last few months have shown that it is not capable of running it. The globalization of political life and civil society leads us to attempt to reach beyond national limitations to confront our problems. Liberalization has generated significant growth in trade and investments. It has also led to increased transparency between our different social systems. This transparency obliges us more than in the past to reflect upon our concepts of the rights of the individual and the need to defend them.

However, access to the global economic village has not led to a concomitant strengthening of solidarity. The capacity of men and women to adapt has been severely put to the test. The grip of the logic of the marketplace on the individual seems to relegate him to a secondary role in the international system. Our societies should henceforth reconcile the often very divergent effects that globalization has on the individual and on the State — namely, unemployment, competition and financial speculation. The balance between the freedom of some and the rights of others is all too often disturbed. Marginalization and abject poverty are reappearing, thereby threatening the exercise of the most fundamental of rights. After the 1980s — a lost decade, from the point of view of development — the decade of structural adjustments has been unable to put economies back on the road to sustainable development. Differences in income, both at the level of society and at the global level, have been accentuated. What can we do? What must we do?

The Internet and the financial markets by themselves cannot hold the international community together. We know that Governments alone are incapable of dealing with the problems with which they are confronted. This is why new forms of solidarity and new ways of dealing with these issues are indispensable. Only a strong political international organization can counterbalance the forces of the financial markets. The loss of power of nation-States over financial and economic decisions is glaring; the social consequences are even more so. This does not call into question the existing consensus on the validity of controlled liberalization of trade, but it does put all Governments up against the wall. Has the time not come for some sort of regulation that benefits everyone?

Indeed, liberalization cannot be an end in itself. It has no purpose if it does not contribute to social progress for the largest possible number of people. We should therefore strive together to find concerted responses to the uncontrolled and painful effects of this evolution by strengthening public control throughout the world. In this regard some have proposed an economic security council. This is obviously an ambitious idea, but it does serve to show how serious the threat of financial instability and economic uncertainty is to our societies. In any case, an intensified dialogue between the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions must be instituted as a first step.

Of course, regional strategies have been developed to strengthen economic convergence in certain regions and to integrate them into zones. Nevertheless, these regional strategies should respect the rules of multilateralism. Efficient partnerships based on mutual trade have to be developed with other regions without marginalizing third States. Developing countries must be integrated in commerce and enjoy the fruits of market liberalization. In this respect, my country supports the efforts placed on record by the European Union in the spirit referred to as "fair trade".

I would now like to say a few words about the United Nations, which is at the centre of all these interactions. I say to you, the representatives of the 185 nations committed to the pursuit of the objectives of the United Nations, that we have all too often forgotten our obligations under the Charter. Now that we are free of the shackles of the cold war and its ideological deadlocks, the obligation to strengthen cohesion between States and to promote social justice is more than ever the real order of business.

In this respect, I support the proposal to devote the Millennium Assembly to the issue of the fight against poverty. The gaze of much of the world will be turned towards the United Nations at that time. It would be a terrible failure if on that occasion we were only able to refer poverty to various committees, soothing our conscience with meetings of fleeting significance. As the Secretary-General stresses in his report, the fight against poverty starts with good governance. Political democratization and mechanisms for revenue sharing are indispensable elements.

The question of Central Africa is currently of particular importance for Africa. After hopes were raised for what some wanted to call an African renaissance, the continent has again become prey to violence that is becoming dangerously ethnic in character. Once again, the principal victims are among the most vulnerable people in the world.

The crisis in the Great Lakes region is a moral challenge for the United Nations. It imposes on us the duty of solidarity. We must help Africa to find solutions and to implement them without interfering or trying to impose solutions. The United Nations, together with the relevant regional and subregional organizations, should involve itself in an initiative to restore dialogue to the region and to put confidence-building measures in place. I believe that a conference on regional security and cooperation in the Great Lakes region — if it is viewed as a process rather than as a single event — could serve as the vehicle for stabilizing the region. My country is willing to support such an initiative.

Political instability, uninterrupted violence and challenges to the nation State have led to large-scale population movements. In Central Africa, Kosovo and elsewhere, hundreds of thousands of families have been forced to flee their homes and their land. It is our shared duty to continue to assist humanitarian organizations in their efforts to come to the aid of these refugees and to enable them to return home. However, sometimes, when the roads or the family land are littered with landmines and children cannot go to school without being exposed to physical danger, returning can be a problem. We must rid ourselves of these landmines; their production must stop. These devices of death must be for ever banished from the Earth.

I welcome the entry into force of the Convention on the total prohibition of anti-personnel landmines and appeal to donor and victim countries to support the integrated activities undertaken by the United Nations in this field, including through voluntary financial contributions.

But that is not enough. Conflict prevention should be a priority, and within our Organization we must also pay attention to the less spectacular aspects of conflict prevention, such as early warning and the establishment of an appropriate United Nations presence on the ground.

Conflict prevention will make no sense if we do not at the same time put an end to the acquisition of arms by those who attempt to resolve their problems through violence. Belgium has responded positively to the European Union initiative to formulate a code of conduct for arms transactions. My country is also a strong advocate of giving the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms effective universal application. It is also behind several initiatives designed to block the illegal transfer of small arms. The Brussels conference, which will take place in October, and our participation on the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms, provide further examples of our commitment, which extends to all sectors of disarmament. How could it be otherwise, when some countries consider it useful to put on an alarming show of their nuclear expertise?

A significant contribution to ethical renewal in international relations was the adoption, after much work,

of the Statute of the International Criminal Court. It is indeed shocking that those responsible for the most reprehensible crimes, in particular genocide, can go unpunished. Belgium has recently signed the Statute of the International Criminal Court and intends to work for its effective establishment. My country will also continue to support the two existing United Nations ad hoc criminal tribunals. Some countries still harbour doubts about that important undertaking. However, a balance has been found between international security and justice. The only remaining question is .whether we, so-called civilized nations, are prepared to adopt binding rules so as to ensure respect for the most elementary and universally accepted principles of respect for the human being and international coexistence. Adopting voluntary restrictions to strengthen an international ethical code can only benefit States and their citizens. That is truly the role of the State: to ensure that its citizens are protected — if necessary, through international law.

I do not consider it realistic to develop a global ethical code without working for the protection and education of our children. Working together with other countries, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other United Nations organizations, Belgium has played an important role in a number of initiatives. I propose that the General Assembly at its fifty-third session build upon its achievements with respect to the definition of standards for the protection of children. Child labour is a waste of human beings — for the girls and boys who are subjected to it and for future generations. Market forces must yield in this area. Like the enlistment of child soldiers, child labour is a moral scandal that must be remedied through the development of alternatives adapted to the sociocultural context at the local level.

One of my Government's priorities is the fight against the most repugnant forms of exploitation. We are alarmed by the use of the Internet by those who traffic in children and by networks of prostitutes and all the new forms of crime that make a mockery of traditional methods of defending the rule of law. Here, too, international cooperation is the only solution.

I am also ready to take the initi...ive, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Convention of the Rights of the Child in 1999, to organize, together with UNICEF and all interested countries, a meeting in Belgium at which we can all share our experiences with regard to our respective legislation.

The ideas that I have outlined will be not bear fruit if Member States do not cooperate fully with the Organization. Denying the Secretary-General the resources needed to turn the United Nations into an efficient instrument will only make matters worse. The Secretary-General deserves our full support in his reform efforts.

The Security Council is crucial for the maintenance of international peace and security. Its reform is of concern to us all. I hope that in the not-too-distant future, a balanced enlargement of the Council can be agreed upon. The work undertaken during the past year has sometimes been disappointing because of the stubborn resistance of several countries. Belgium belongs to the majority of Member States arguing for a strengthening of the authority of the Council. My country clearly laid out its position: we would like an equal increase in the number of permanent and non-permanent members, better representation of the various regions and self-imposed limits on the use of the right of veto under certain conditions provided for in advance. The privilege of veto is excessive when it is used to the detriment of the interests of the international community as whole.

The consensus proposal put forward by the group of 10 has numerous advantages and offers material for further reflection. It is quite disturbing to see that a minority of Member States are ignoring the evolution of international relations over the last 50 years while at the same time claiming for themselves a preponderant role in the maintenance of international peace and security. Postponing reform of the Security Council is tantamount to an assault on its credibility.

The financial health of the Organization has not improved much over the course of the last year. Belgium believes that countries that accumulate arrears harm the entire international community. The damage goes beyond the resulting debt, because the Organization is denied the means fully to discharge its mandate. Furthermore, the reform process is jeopardized. Nothing can make up for the damage this does to international cooperation and social progress. The political and moral responsibility of those Governments is at stake. None who speak from this rostrum can claim their attachment to United Nations ideals without accepting the financial obligations involved in being a Member, that is, payment in full, on time and without conditions of their financial contributions.

In face of the excesses of the international system, the international community must be on guard. Here as

well our Organization can be the world's conscience. Its weighty role is to help Member States formulate adequate responses to the globalization with which we are confronted. It is therefore in a serious yet hopeful frame of mind that I look at the agenda of this session of the General Assembly and pledge my country's full support for the work ahead of us.

Mrs. Ataeva (Turkmenistan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Russian*): The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Her Excellency Ms. Tarja Halonen, on whom I now call.

Ms. Halonen (Finland): This year we are commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I should like therefore to congratulate Mr. Opertti very warmly upon his election to the presidency of this session. Finland will give him its full support in his demanding task.

Finland aligns itself with the statement made by my Austrian colleague, Mr. Wolfgang Schüssel, on behalf of the European Union.

As has been mentioned in other statements, one of the catchwords of our time is globalization. We all should be ready to contribute to a constructive international dialogue aiming at improving the joint global responses to the various challenges emanating from this globalization.

We have also done a lot. The United Nations has in the 1990s convened global conferences to enhance development in the fields of human rights, sustainable environmental development, population policies, social development, the advancement of women, food security, human settlements and the rights of the child.

These conferences have set an ambitious global agenda to which Governments are committed. These commitments form a road map which guides the Governments, non-governmental organizations and individuals as well as the United Nations system. The question remains: can the United Nations deliver? Do we, the Member States, want our Organization to be able to deliver? And do we make it our own responsibility to realize our commitments? Then and only then can the United Nations deliver.

And are we also able to see good partners? Democratic Member States and free, capable citizens and their organizations form a good basis for an international network of safety in the world of globalization.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been and is the basis for developing human rights. We should commemorate the Declaration in the daily activities of our Governments and common international institutions. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has emphasized that human rights are the basis for sustainable human development and for the sustainability of any community. I subscribe to his words and endorse his objective of knitting human rights into all United Nations activities. Adequate resources should be secured for this process.

The universal nature of human rights should be beyond question and doubt. All women, men and children who enjoy or are demanding those rights are equal regardless of their nationality or cultural identity.

This year, human rights are being made more widely and better known because there are still women, men and children who are not aware of their rights. Yet consciousness of one's rights is the basis for the rule of law, democracy, good governance and full enjoyment of human rights. Awareness-raising is the key to concrete results in the field of human rights.

The Criminal Court will become an effective mechanism for the trial of war criminals, as well as a real deterrent against genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. It is particularly important that the Court make sure also that those individuals who are responsible for atrocities in connection with internal conflicts will be brought to justice.

It is important that special provisions for the protection of women and children were included in the definition of war crimes and crimes against humanity as well as elsewhere in the Statute. The Criminal Court should keep this in mind in its everyday work. As the experience of the two ad hoc tribunals shows, special expertise is needed for that purpose.

In this connection, let me emphasize that Finland also strongly supports the finalization of an optional protocol on children in armed conflicts based on an age limit of 18 years. The suffering inflicted on children by conflicts is intolerable. It is high time to act.

We have once again been reminded that terrorism constitutes a growing threat to human beings, internal and international security and the functioning of democratic institutions. Within the framework of the United Nations, important work has been done in the fight against terrorism. A sustainable response to terrorism can be found only through intensified efforts within the United Nations and improved operational cooperation between States. In this regard, I want to stress that the fight against terrorism should be carried out in accordance with relevant international instruments, including those related to human rights.

Finland calls for ratification and full implementation of the international conventions on the suppression of terrorism and an early finalization and acceptance of the convention on the suppression of acts of nuclear terrorism.

Another way to secure our global neighbourhood is to continue disarmament and non-proliferation efforts. The ongoing efforts of the international community were challenged by the nuclear test explosions by India and Pakistan. Finland deplored these actions. Now it is important to prevent a nuclear arms race in South Asia. We call on India and Pakistan to confirm their promises not to test again through adherence to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). The CTBT remains a strong and dynamic cornerstone of the global security system. It serves the interests of all States.

Finland welcomes the agreement to begin negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. A cap on the production of fissile material will serve both nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

Conventional weapons are increasingly included in disarmament efforts. Finland warmly welcomes this development. In several conflict areas, the accumulation of weapons is threatening the very existence of nations. We welcome the entry into force of the Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel landmines following the fortieth ratification last week.

The issue of small arms is acute. Readily available and easy to use, small arms are the main tools of violence in today's conflicts. The world community needs to respond to the problem of small arms through both enhanced global and regional cooperation. Member States need to control their exports and other transfers of small arms. But that is not enough. An integrated approach involving measures addressing both security and development of societies is required. Finland supports a lead role for the United Nations on the issue of small arms. We look forward to the recommendations next year by the United Nations panel on small arms.

On the opening day of this session due tribute was paid to the women and men who have served during the past 50 years in United Nations peacekeeping operations. The Organization has a unique role in peacekeeping. Finland reiterates its firm support and commitment to this essential function of the United Nations in global collective security. The world needs the peacekeeping and peace-building capability of the United Nations. We have to strengthen the capacity of the Organization in these fields. Finland calls upon Member States to secure financing for this purpose.

Attacks against unarmed United Nations personnel and humanitarian workers are increasing. This trend has to be reversed. Parties to any conflict must respect international humanitarian law.

We have the global agenda, and the commitments are there. For implementation we need a strong United Nations. The Secretary-General's reform package must be implemented without delay. The proposals for reform in the economic and social sector need to be realized. It is also high time to enter into real negotiations on the reform of the Security Council. All we need is political will. The reform process must lead to a strengthened and more efficient United Nations.

Finland values the reforms undertaken by the Secretary General, Kofi Annan. We highly appreciate his leadership as the head of this Organization, and we continue to support him in his endeavours. Member States must provide the United Nations with sufficient means. They must fulfil their financial obligations towards the United Nations, in full, on time and without conditions. Without a sound financial basis even the efforts at reforming the United Nations are bound to fail.

Finland also calls for better cooperation and coordination of development activities both within the United Nations system and between the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions. An efficient implementation of the global agenda requires more coherent approaches from the different actors in the field of development.

Today's global, regional and local problems have their economic, environmental and social dimensions. A

large-scale problem of a developmental, ecological or humanitarian nature may even turn into an armed conflict. Intertwined problems call for integrated responses. We have good examples of integrated approaches in southern Africa, as well as in Guatemala and in El Salvador. Peace agreements and operational agendas include agreements on human rights, identity and the rights of indigenous people, social and economic aspects and strengthening of civilian power, as well as defining the role of the armed forces. Constitutional reforms and electoral regimes are also essential, as is monitoring of the functioning of the courts as a prerequisite for the reform of judicial systems. We also see the importance of good governance.

We must secure the future of the United Nations, in terms not only of finance but of political support as well. Here Governments and the Organization can benefit from public interest in the United Nations. We attach high expectations to the Millennium Assembly and to the role and participation of civil society in the Millennium Forum. The Forum can give us guidance from all sectors of our societies on which way to continue.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Russian*): I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Namibia, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab.

Mr. Gurirab (Namibia): Before I deliver my statement, let me express on behalf of my country our heartfelt sympathy to the Governments and peoples of the Caribbean that have fallen victim to the devastating onslaught of Hurricane Georges. I hope that we all in the international community will extend to them comfort and humanitarian assistance with all deliberate speed.

Let me add my voice to the other speakers in felicitating Mr. Opertti upon his unanimous election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. Namibia will readily lend him our full support and cooperation during his tenure of office. Our two countries — Uruguay and Namibia — have worked very closely together and with other friendly countries in bringing about the African-Latin American initiative, a necessary and timely innovation aimed at concretizing a mutually felt need for greater interaction between our two neighbouring continents. I wish him all the luck.

Let me also take this opportunity to congratulate his predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, former Foreign Minister of Ukraine, who so ably presided over the work of the General Assembly during a period in which the Organization took bold steps towards institutional transformation and in various social and technical fields. Not only did he prove his leadership qualities and diplomatic skills, but he also, and more importantly, sought to promote the important role of the General Assembly itself in the larger context of the maintenance of international peace and security, and particularly the preservation of human security. For small and developing countries like Namibia, the Assembly is where democracy comes alive as the world's biggest parliament.

To the Secretary-General of our Organization, Mr. Kofi Annan, my delegation pledges its fullest support for his tireless efforts to provide effective leadership and practical ideas as we try to find workable solutions to the new challenges facing the global community. His annual report and the important statement he delivered yesterday provided inspiration and reassurance. I congratulate him for his vision and initiatives.

Let me say a word or two about the United Nations reform process. We are two years away from the new millennium and, for some time now, we have all being addressing some of those challenges that lie ahead and how the United Nations can transform itself to more effectively respond to the needs and aspirations of its Members in the twenty-first century. The initial work of revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and development fields has been partially completed. Reform of the United Nations is an ongoing process and Namibia believes that an important lesson can be learnt from what has been achieved so far: no quick fixes, but also no indefinite negotiations. The management of the global economy is a top priority. Economic disparities and social backlogs in our societies must be mitigated.

Africa's position on the enlargement of the Security Council is on the table. It includes two permanent seats on the Council and additional non-permanent seats. Namibia also calls for the abolition of the veto power. We have done so before and I am repeating that call once again, for the veto negates the very idea of United Nations reform and democratization.

Let me also say here that, while we take into account the purposes of the United Nations as stated in Article 1 of the Charter, it is also important that we take effective and collective measures to finance the United Nations. In this regard, Namibia urges all Member States to pay their contributions in full and on time and to clear their arrears in order to enable the Secretary-General to

fully carry out the resolutions of the General Assembly and, indeed, also those of the Security Council.

I wish to say a word or two about peace and development. In 1995, all the world leaders who converged on New York for the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations reiterated, in their different languages yet in unison, their common commitment to the highest virtues of human dignity, peace and security, sustainable development and prosperity for all. Three years later, it looks everywhere as if it is a question of business as usual. Much more needs to be done in the areas of poverty eradication, human resource development and gender equality, as well as transfer of technology and resources for development from the rich to the poor.

Wherever in this, our one world, economic disparity, social injustice, armed conflicts, political instability and indeed environmental degradation prevail, there can be no rewarding human existence, meaningful productivity to sustain life and civilization, nor lasting scientific and technological breakthroughs in the service of this and future generations.

Today's very topical questions of democracy, human rights, good governance and globalization now seem to end up on the back burner of the global agenda. Other priorities always seem to enjoy more attention. Much needed resources are being driven more and more away towards greater benefits for the military-industrial enterprises of the rich and the powerful nations. The result is further impoverishment of the nations and peoples of the third world.

Happily, we have been joined by two illustrious champions in a worthy human cause: Danny Glover, African-American actor activist, and Nadine Gordimer, South African Nobel laureate, who will, jointly and individually, articulate worldwide the plight of the forgotten masses in the third world, as the United Nations Development Programme's Goodwill Ambassadors. Both of them are my personal friends, and I congratulate them and heartily welcome them aboard.

It has been said by a third world leader that:

> "We live in an international jungle. There is no law and order in international relations. There is very little justice. The high and the mighty rule everywhere. The weak and the poor just have to lump it."

It is hardly possible to dispute this.

With regard to issues of multilateral trade that are of concern to the developing countries, there is an imperative need for us to articulate a specific and constructive South agenda. The developing countries must develop a common position on, for example, whether there should be a new round of World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations or whether a sectoral approach is preferable. These are our common concerns that the Group of 77 should be spearheading in WTO negotiations, as well as in the South-North dialogue.

Globalization is here to stay. We welcome it. But it is not in itself a panacea for ensuring the people's economic rights at home or a just world order, based on cooperation and equity. Globalization must be our thing collectively as members of the human family. When one section of the family prospers, the rest should be allowed to share in that bonanza. To condemn a section of the family to a perpetual state of marginalization would be inhuman and unkind.

The heavy burden of external debt is denuding the resources and capacity of poor nations, mainly those in Africa. External debt cannot merely be reorganized. Debt write-off is the best and the most humane thing to do, under the present circumstances. Some major Western creditors have written off debt, others should follow. Bretton Woods institutions should rethink their insistence on bleeding conditionalities in terms of official capital flows and debt relief in favour of providing assistance towards stimulating economic growth and productivity that will help poverty eradication in the developing countries. In this connection, it is to be hoped that the recent meeting held in New York with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) will be a harbinger of new and better things to come.

The Group of 77, which is the task force for the member States of the Non-Aligned Movement, together with our many friends, must continue to work hard in order to hasten implementation of the Agenda 21 Programme of Action in its entirety. For globalization and liberalization to be carried out successfully in pursuit of our shared ideals of democratization, economic justice and human security, South-North dialogue should be open and constructive in the spirit of "smart" partnership, devoid of confrontation and blackmail.

At the 1998 Southern African Development Community (SADC) Summit of Heads of State or

Government, held at Grand Bay, Mauritius, on 13 and 14 September, the regional African leaders endorsed policy guidelines that will facilitate the speedy completion of SADC's transformation into a dynamic development community. This exercise will be carried out on the basis of the review and rationalization of the SADC Programme of Action. The Summit reaffirmed the ongoing work on sectoral coordination by member States to ensure streamlining of sectors and increase regional integration and productivity. The member States were urged to expedite ratification of the trade protocol as a matter of the utmost priority. This will open up greater opportunities for regional economic cooperation and trade between them.

Added to these actions that have already been taken or are being envisaged was the strong reiteration that all SADC regional policies and activities must be carried out pursuant to the objectives and goals of the African Economic Community. The first significant step taken in this direction was the signing on 25 February 1998, in Addis Ababa, of the Protocol on The Relationship between the African Economic Community and the Regional Economic Communities. For 1999, the Summit set a theme for SADC:

> "SADC in the next Millennium: The Challenges and Opportunities of Information Technology."

That is the vision that seeks to promote the socio-economic empowerment of the people. Political and economic reforms that have started in Africa must stay on course and produce the results that our people want.

Regarding regional conflicts, as other speakers have noted, the maintenance of international peace and security is constantly being threatened by ongoing as well as new regional conflicts. Lately, dastardly acts of terrorism and indiscriminate counter-attacks have become frequent happenings. In Europe, bloody confrontation and human suffering persist in Bosnia, Albania and Kosovo. In West and South Asia, a very explosive political, military and nuclear situation is fast developing into an undeclared state of war and a likely destabilization of that strategic region. We welcome the high-level and face-to-face meetings now taking place between some of the leaders from that region.

Sadly, there is a serious situation of stalemate, reversals and prevarication in the Middle East, and the peace process has by now, to all intents and purposes, reached a precipitous dead end. Israel cannot hope to live in security if the universally accepted principle of land for peace is not scrupulously adhered to and implemented without delay. The legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State of their own, cannot be sacrificed because of a single-minded insistence on security. An early agreement on a just, comprehensive and durable peace for the whole of the Middle East is the only viable guarantee for peace, stability, security and cooperation in the best interests of one and all. Namibia supports that approach and not the politics of confrontation and nullification.

In our own SADC subregion, some of the old conflicts have gone from bad to worse and new ones have been ignited. In Angola, renewed military attacks and defiance of the demands of the United Nations and the rest of the international community by Mr. Savimbi and UNITA have derailed the peace process and delayed the finalization of the implementation of the remaining aspects of the 1994 Lusaka Protocol. The Security Council has reacted forcefully to UNITA's non-compliance by imposing stringent sanctions on it and, once again, has demanded speedy and full implementation of the Lusaka Protocol.

Furthermore, the last summit of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), held in Ouagadougou, was equally unsparing in its condemnation of Mr. Savimbi and UNITA for unceasing delaying tactics and political violence against innocent Angolans and the unsuspecting citizens of neighbouring States, including my own country, Namibia. The recently concluded SADC Summit resolved, among other things, that measures must be taken to ensure compliance by Mr. Savimbi and UNITA with the decisions that member States have made through SADC, the OAU and United Nations resolutions.

The Summit further called on the international community, particularly countries and leaders who have an influence on Mr. Savimbi, to persuade the rebel movement to rededicate itself to the path of peace and reconstruction in Angola, as a matter of urgency.

On another front, the Kingdom of Lesotho is once again teetering on the brink of serious destabilization and social disorder just because some politicians, who were defeated in the last general elections, have taken the law into their own hands. It has become an acute situation, which our regional leaders are urgently and jointly trying to resolve peacefully.

Moreover, other misguided men, driven by a blind ambition and appetite for needless confrontation, have

plunged the Democratic Republic of the Congo into a devastating war, which has resulted in inter-African fighting on the battlefield of that sister country. Namibia has joined the other SADC member States, at the express invitation of President Laurent Kabila and his legitimate Government, for the sole purpose of preventing the collapse of the State machinery and the violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a fellow SADC member State by the invading armies and their collaborators. Namibia's involvement is for peace, democracy, human rights and regional cooperation.

The recent SADC Summit expressed itself on the situation, and it is important that I quote a few passages what it said, as follows:

> "The Summit expressed deep regret at the outbreak of war in DRC, as a result of attempts by rebels and their allies to forcefully remove the Government of President Kabila from power.
>
> "The Summit welcomed the initiatives by SADC and its member States intended to assist in the restoration of peace, security and stability in the DRC, in particular the Victoria Falls and Pretoria initiatives. In that regard, the Summit reaffirmed its call for an immediate cessation of hostilities and commended the Governments of Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe for timeously providing troops to assist the Government and people of the DRC to defeat the illegal attempt by rebels and their allies to capture the capital city, Kinshasa, and other strategic areas. The Summit emphasized the need for all political actor in the DRC to commit themselves to orderly and peaceful transition to multi-party democracy, primarily through constructive consultations and negotiations involving all stakeholders."

As freedom fighters, we never relied on ethnicity to win victory against the oppressor nor can we ever accept today any idea of regional hegemony based on ethnicity and *Herrenvolk* tendencies from any quarter. African unity and cooperation must be based on a genuine spirit of solidarity and sharing, and not on subversion and disunity.

There are some outstanding questions that I would like to deal with now briefly.

Our agenda still has on it the unfinished business of, for example, decolonization, conflict resolution and peacekeeping.

The legitimate cause of the Palestinian people, led by the Palestine Liberation Organization, and their full enjoyment of the right to self-determination, independence and sovereignty, cannot end with the creation of an Authority which is only an interim mechanism. The goal which the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement and certainly we in Namibia support, is that of unfettered statehood as envisaged in the Charter of the United Nations and international law. I say this simply to restate our well-known position on the question of Palestine.

Cyprus, a fellow Member State of the United Nations and of the Commonwealth, is being bullied by a bigger and powerful neighbour which is perpetuating by means of fiat the unlawful division of that peaceful island State. Namibia is aware of the repeated initiatives of the Secretary-General to end the deadlock; so far his efforts have been unsuccessful. The United Nations and the world community must not forget the nation of Cyprus and its heroic people.

At last, there is a light at the end of the tunnel concerning the resolution of the question of Western Sahara. Following the Houston accords brokered by Mr. James Baker, former United States Secretary of State, there is now an agreement between the parties concerned for a free and fair referendum to be held in December this year. With this in mind, Namibia urges the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations to ensure that the deadline is kept and that the people themselves are given a genuine choice regarding their future. In this way, Africa's last colonial question will be finally resolved and the Kingdom of Morocco will return to the fold of the OAU, of which it is a proud founding member. It will be a happy day for all Africans.

Now that the question of East Timor has been put back on the front burner, Namibia lends its full support to the latest steps that the Secretary-General has taken to find an amicable and lasting solution, in cooperation with Indonesia, Portugal and the inhabitants of East Timor.

We apparently welcomed too hastily what we thought was good news concerning a peaceful settlement of the Lockerbie affair by the application of law. The good news has all of a sudden been eclipsed by bad news or misunderstandings that need to be carefully sorted out in the spirit of give and take among the principal parties. There are clearly serious legal and technical matters that require further consultations and clarifications between Libya, on the one hand, and the United Kingdom and the

United States, on the other. Africa's well-reasoned and constructive position on this issue was reinforced at the last OAU summit, held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. In this connection, the decisions taken there are being implemented by African leaders. Among them is a renewed call for the Security Council to lift the punitive and outdated sanctions imposed on Libya several years ago. The suffering of innocent people should quickly be brought to an end.

In conclusion, allow me to share a few personal thoughts. In his valedictory address to the General Assembly, President Mandela of South Africa referred to the connections between the United Nations and South Africa and invoked some memories of the past, beginning in 1946. Those memories and connections also included my own country, Namibia, a former colony of apartheid South Africa and a territory for which the United Nations assumed direct legal responsibility for 24 years, from 1966 until 1990. That special linkage ended on 21 March 1990, the glorious day of our independence. But the long-established relationship between the United Nations family and the Namibian people continues unabated.

During the past more than 26 years of my active involvement in politics and diplomacy, I have known the United Nations system as my home. In various incarnations, I have walked the heights, the depths and the corridors of this magnificent edifice of human brotherhood, liberation, equality and justice. Many mentors and friends from across the globe have held my hand in support, encouragement and solidarity. They have contributed enormously to my formation and maturity.

I did my undergraduate and postgraduate studies in this country under a United Nations fellowship. On 25 September — that is, next Friday — I am going to receive an award from the World Association of Former United Nations Interns and Fellows for, they tell me, an

> "outstanding contribution to the promotion of human rights, peace and development, especially within the context of promoting Namibia's nation-building and the role that United Nations training and other economic and technical cooperation activities can still play".

I am deeply touched by this generous gesture, and I am immensely grateful. This is the result of my partnership with the United Nations and its varied agencies as well as with friends the world over.

I, actively supported by my Government, have announced my candidature for the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth regular session, in 1999. In this connection, I am most delighted to announce from this mighty rostrum that in June this year, in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government endorsed me as the sole African candidate for the position. I trust that I can count on all the Member States from other regions to cast their votes in support of my candidature when the time comes. By doing so, you will have made me extremely happy. But, more than that, you will have endorsed unanimously the collective wish of the African continent.

Lastly, and in this context, I endorse the sentiments expressed by our Secretary-General in respect of making the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, which falls in the year 2000, the Millennium Assembly. But I believe the preparations must be made during the fifty-fourth session, and Africa is ready to lead the way into the twenty-first century.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Russian*): I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Mozambique, His Excellency Mr. Leonardo Santos Simão.

Mr. Simão (Mozambique): At the outset, allow me to join the previous speakers in congratulating Mr. Opertti most sincerely, on his election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. His election is indeed a recognition of his excellent qualities as an experienced and seasoned diplomat committed to the ideals of peace. As I congratulate him today, I am reminded of the excellent role played by Uruguay in assisting Mozambique to consolidate peace and stability. On behalf of my Government, and on my own behalf, I wish to seize this opportunity to express our heartfelt tribute to those young men who lost their lives in the search for peace in my country.

Let me also pay well-deserved tribute for the excellent manner in which his predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, discharged his duties as President of the General Assembly at its last session.

I also wish to commend the Secretary-General for his continued devotion to peace and development worldwide. His recent initiatives in this regard deserve my Government's full support, and we look forward to continuing to work closely with him.

In my last address to this body, one year ago, I spoke of positive changes which had taken place in my country. I am pleased to reconfirm today that the people of Mozambique remain firm in their determination to undertake bold steps aimed at ensuring and further strengthening democracy, good governance and the rule of law. Within this context, the first municipal elections were held in June this year, thus consolidating the process initiated with the holding of the general elections four years ago. Preparations are currently under way for the forthcoming general elections, scheduled for 1999.

The implementation of structural and economic reforms under the most severe circumstances over the last 11 years should be seen within this perspective. Mozambique is emerging step by step from the scourges of war and is gradually proving that, with hard work and adequate international assistance, the country can and will be a valuable partner in the international market place.

We believe that by concentrating on economic fundamentals — including low inflation rates, a stable currency and a transparent exchange-rate policy, stimulating private-sector growth and increasing foreign and domestic investment flows — our economy can achieve the desired results. These measures have enabled Mozambique to achieve a growth of 14 per cent in its gross domestic product last year, compared to a real average growth of about 6.6 per cent from 1991 to 1996. In addition, increased agricultural production, coupled with the privatization of over 900 Government-owned companies and the rehabilitation and restructuring of the main elements of infrastructure — such as roads, ports and railways — have significantly contributed to raising productivity and have played a critical role in achieving these encouraging economic results.

The report of the Secretary-General on assistance to Mozambique, which I highly commend, provides a further account of the state of the Mozambican economy today.

Moreover, the Governments of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, in close cooperation with the private sector, are taking aggressive steps towards regional integration. These include, *inter alia*, the launching of mega-projects, such as the Maputo Development Corridor, a joint initiative by the Governments of Mozambique and of South Africa; the $1.3 billion MOZAL aluminum smelter, recently announced by the London Metals Exchange, a multi-partnership investment; and the Libombo Spatial Development Initiative, involving Mozambique, Swaziland and South Africa.

Notwithstanding these positive developments, we are still faced with acute problems whose solution is vital if the country is to maintain the needed stability. The most critical of these, without a doubt, is the debt burden, which continues to be the single most significant impediment to national development.

My Government welcomes the decision taken in April this year by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) with regard to the eligibility of Mozambique to debt relief within the framework of Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative. We regard this Initiative as a recognition by the international community of my Government's continued commitment to undertake sound political and economic reforms, and also of the suffering endured by our people throughout these years of the implementation of such measures.

While representing a significant step in the right direction, the Initiative in its present form is not yet a definite solution to the debt problem. Further assistance by the international community, and the creditor community in particular, is required. We need to ensure the irreversibility of the positive developments, especially taking into account that even with current relief measures, poor countries, particularly the least developed countries, remain poor. We would therefore encourage the creditor and donor communities to continue to review and consider new relief measures, including the cancellation of official bilateral debt, in order to ensure that the affected countries can redirect their meagre resources to social programmes.

As a matter of fact, the eleventh meeting of the Consultative Group for Mozambique is taking place tomorrow in Maputo. The holding of this meeting on Mozambican soil for the first time symbolizes the growing relationship between Mozambique and its partners, and my Government will do its utmost to ensure a successful outcome of the proceedings with the creditor community.

Moreover, we are still confronted with the issue of the prevailing threat of anti-personnel landmines, which continue to disrupt the very existence of nations and peoples. For this reason, my Government has signed and ratified the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel

Mines and on Their Destruction. We did so as a recognition of the imperative need to find durable solutions to this issue. We warmly welcome the fortieth ratification, by Burkina Faso, which will enable the Convention to enter into force, and we hope other countries will do the same as soon as possible.

In this regard, my Government offered to host in Maputo next year the first meeting of States parties to the Ottawa Convention, in accordance with article 11 of the Convention. It is our hope that the meeting will result in the adoption of meaningful recommendations to address in a comprehensive manner the issue of anti-personnel landmines, particularly international cooperation and assistance and other relevant issues envisaged by this important instrument of international humanitarian law. We are eager to welcome all of you to Maputo.

Let me take this opportunity to express my Government's deep gratitude and appreciation to the pioneering role of Canada on this issue. It is my hope that all interested parties will take an active part in the deliberations within the framework of the draft resolution to be presented in the First Committee.

Last April, the Secretary-General presented his report to the Security Council on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa. We wish to commend him for his vision in preparing that report. The Secretary-General's report represents a valuable contribution for a better understanding of African problems and offers concrete recommendations for durable solutions by the international community. All efforts should be deployed to ensure that that report does not follow the negative examples of other similarly important reports prepared by the United Nations before.

I am particularly thankful for the recommendation that economic sanctions should be better targeted in order to prevent the unnecessary suffering of innocent people, as we have been witnessing over the years.

The concept of peace-friendly structural adjustment programmes should be fully implemented in order to minimize the negative consequences of such programmes for the well-being of peoples. As outlined in these recommendations: conditionalities should not be antithetical to peace processes; donors should not cut off funds from weak governments which, in good faith, are making popularly supported efforts to implement peace agreements; aid should be focused on high-impact areas to reduce dependence; donors should strive to ensure that at least 50 per cent of their aid to Africa is spent in Africa; and the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative should be expanded to benefit more African countries. These recommendations deserve our full support, and what is now required of us is to find the best ways and means of putting them into practice.

I would also agree with the Secretary-General when he stresses that, without political will, Africa will remain behind, with nothing to offer to future generations. For these reasons, I wish to endorse the proposed holding of Security Council meetings at ministerial level on a biennial basis to assess efforts undertaken and actions needed in this regard. Moreover, the convening of the Security Council at summit level within five years to discuss the situation in Africa could not be more timely. Indeed, it is high time for the Council to devote the necessary attention to African problems if the international community is to ensure a better future for the African continent.

Today as yesterday, globalization is a matter of fact. However, we cannot afford to leave vast segments of nations and peoples unattended and still confronting basic challenges such as famine, epidemic diseases and inadequate water distribution, among other challenges. As an African, I am certain that Africa is prepared to shoulder its responsibilities in this regard, so that together we will be able to work towards a common goal.

The crisis which initially begun as an isolated case in the Asian economies has rapidly spread to virtually all continents. Its consequences have demonstrated that no country in this globalized economy is immune to the suffering of other nations. Adequate solutions lie in sustainable development based on partnership in development cooperation. The persistence of extreme poverty in developing countries, particularly in the least developed ones, will continue to represent a threat to the economies of developed countries. The new vision which appears to emerge from the Bretton Woods institutions, bringing together the United Nations and other partners in the solution of social problems, will contribute to addressing major challenges facing our countries today.

I would like to take this opportunity to praise the two-day high-level meetings of the General Assembly held a few days ago on renewal of the dialogue on strengthening international cooperation for development through partnership and on the social and economic impact of globalization and interdependence and their

policy implications. The meetings demonstrated the need to bring together governments, the private sector and other relevant segments of civil society in the search for solutions to global problems.

We therefore hope that the ongoing reform of the United Nations will open new windows for the Organization to strengthen its role and functions in the promotion of international cooperation for the social and economic development of developing countries. As has been emphasized, the United Nations, by virtue of its universal membership, is the most credible instrument for performing development tasks.

Regional conflicts continue to be a major concern on the agenda of the United Nations. Despite the recent signing of understandings at Victoria Falls, the hostilities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo continue unabated. We are deeply concerned by the course of events, which threatens not only the territorial integrity of that country but also peace and stability in the Great Lakes region as a whole. We believe that with good will there can be a solution addressing the concerns of all parties involved in this conflict. Neither Africa nor the international community can afford to add a new chapter of conflicts of regional proportions, especially taking into account that virtually all other long-standing conflicts in that continent continue to defy our collective imagination.

With respect to Angola, we are equally concerned with continued procrastination by Mr. Savimbi in the implementation of undertakings within the framework of the Lusaka Protocol and of relevant Security Council resolutions. It is, indeed, the failure of União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA) to live up to its obligations which is leading the peace process in Angola to the brink of collapse. Both the international community and the parties concerned have an obligation to rescue the suffering people of Angola from the prospect of yet another conflict of major proportions. The attainment of peace in Angola would undoubtedly contribute to bringing about needed stability in the region.

We are fully associated with the progress made by the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries and by the Economic Community of West African States in the search for the peace which has eluded Guinea-Bissau since the outbreak of hostilities in that country. These positive developments underline the importance of political will by the parties concerned, which should prevail in conflict situations. My Government is also encouraged by the developments concerning Western Sahara, and looks forward to the holding of the referendum in that Territory.

It is our hope that wisdom and statesmanship will prevail, and that peace and stability will ultimately become a reality in Somalia, the Horn of Africa, the Sudan and other troubled regions of the African continent and beyond.

We are encouraged by the recent developments concerning East Timor, as illustrated by the outcome of the most recent meeting, held in New York, between the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia and of Portugal under the auspices of the Secretary-General. We wish to encourage them to pursue further these efforts with a view to finding a lasting and internationally acceptable solution to this issue.

My Government has been following with keen interest the latest developments in the Middle East. We have good reason to be disappointed by the course of events since the last session of the General Assembly. Without a comprehensive and just solution to the question of Palestine, which is the core of the conflict in the Middle East, as well as respect for the legitimate interests of all peoples of the region, the prospects for a lasting peace remain in danger.

In addition, the latest developments concerning nuclear proliferation in South Asia have added new elements of destabilization to the already volatile international security environment. The new arms race in that region constitutes a major setback in the international efforts aimed at ensuring peace, security and stability in that region and in the world at large. Rather than providing security guarantees for the countries concerned, the new reality has in fact exacerbated the tensions in the region.

This session of the General Assembly takes place at an auspicious time for all the peoples of the world: 1998 will be recorded as the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Through concrete actions the international community must honour those who have lost their lives in defence of human dignity during the 50 years of the existence of the Universal Declaration. Through concrete actions we must ensure that the horrors and uncertainties of the past and the continued violations of fundamental human rights are not repeated in the new millennium. We must devise appropriate strategies and find ways and means which will enable future generations to live in harmony, peace

and development, and which will prevent the recurrence of the abuses of human dignity that have been witnessed throughout human history.

It is only through such actions that we can ensure that the motto of "all human rights for all" is fully realized. As the Secretary-General once reminded us, human rights belong to no Government and are limited to no continent, for they are fundamental to humankind itself.

We in Mozambique look forward to the celebrations as a source of momentum in educating ourselves about the scope and magnitude of human rights and fundamental freedoms, taking into account that the promotion and protection of these rights is essentially everyone's responsibility. However, we recognize the primary responsibility of the State in ensuring the enjoyment of human rights by our citizens. My Government underscores the need to assert the integrated, interdependent and indivisible nature of all categories of rights, in which both political and civil rights, and economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development, are treated equally. The programme we have prepared, which will culminate in a major celebration on 10 December, is in conformity with these principles.

The establishment in Rome last July of the International Criminal Court represents a remarkable contribution by mankind to the protection and promotion of human rights all over the world. In Rome we created an unprecedented comprehensive legal framework to safeguard human rights and bring to justice those responsible for the most heinous crimes ever witnessed by humanity, such as those committed in the recent cases of Rwanda and of the former Yugoslavia.

Although we would have liked a Court with more far-reaching powers, we understand that the present statute adopted in Rome represents a very delicate and difficult compromise achieved through very long and painful negotiations. Efforts must be made to make possible the early entry into force of the statute of the Court. We must also explore all possible avenues offered by the statute to improve the functioning and competence of the Court. That course of action would undoubtedly provide better acceptance of the statute of the Court and would ultimately ensure its universality.

Our success in tackling the human rights issue, sustainable development and conflict resolution as well as in finding consensus on the major issues within the framework of the ongoing process of reform of our Organization will greatly depend on the manner in which we can accommodate our individual and collective interests. Let us work together to ensure the attainment of these objectives, and to enable the United Nations to fulfil its obligations as we enter the new millennium.

The meeting rose at 7.20 p.m.